THE HEART OF THE FURNACE

LAMBERT WILLIAMS



AMERICAN FOUNDATION
FOR THE BLIND INC.

c.1

THE HEART OF THE FURNACE

THE HEART OF THE FURNACE

BY

LAMBERT WILLIAMS



D. APPLETON-CENTURY COMPANY
INCORPORATED
NEW YORK LONDON
1937



COPYRIGHT, 1937, BY
D. APPLETON-CENTURY COMPANY, INC.

All rights reserved. This book, or parts thereof, must not be reproduced in any form without permission of the publisher.

NOTE

Every character in this book is entirely fictitious and no reference whatever is intended to any living person.

HV2345
W
cop.1



PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

THE HEART OF THE FURNACE

CHAPTER I

THEY said he had hit Broido over the head a dozen times with a piece of iron. A dozen times! He couldn't remember. What piece of iron? There wasn't a piece of iron in the whole workshop. We don't cane chairs, he said, make baskets, with pieces of iron. They must be wrong. He had only knocked Broido down the stone stairs. How was he to know how near the stairs they were on the stone landing? And hadn't Broido hit him first? He had always said so, but he didn't know, he couldn't remember. There were worse things than being hit. Besides, Broido was nearly blind, too, though not so blind as he was. Both of them hitting out blindly. But it wasn't that. It was what Broido had said, the dirty swine, and what Broido had said he had done.

That girl of yours, he said, she's a no-good.

What do you mean? said Hans.

Hans, he said, you know quite well what I mean. Stephanie's a no-good.

You bastard, Broido, I said, don't you say that. We

were both caning chairs, sitting together and caning; we had to finish some chairs that night; all the other men in the workshop had gone. A dismal wet sort of night.

Hans and his friend Broido working together. Working by touch, though Broido was a little less blind than he was; he couldn't cross the road alone, but Broido could if he went carefully; at least, he did; he liked to pretend to outsiders that he wasn't so blind. But he went slowly so that after all people did see that he was nearly blind. Hans didn't dare. Broido always took him home, and called for him in the morning. From De Lorentz Street. Sometimes three or four of them would go along together, with linked arms, Broido the only one who could see a little, see dim shapes near at hand. Sometimes if they were late they would take a tram.

And now he was in prison, awaiting trial. Well, whatever he had done, his conscience was clean; nobody should argue him out of that. Hadn't he had time to think it over, to think it all out? Weeks and weeks in gaol? And now he was to come to trial. To-day. Well, he would tell them. Broido had deserved it, he had deserved all he got, the dirty swine that he had turned out to be. His friend, yet all the time a dirty swine.

What could they do to a blind man? It was an accident, how could it be anything else? They must see that. Of course he hadn't meant to do him in. Mad? No, I wasn't mad, he said, unless something in me was. Some swift ferocity, uncontrollable. He hadn't meant to do him in. He had told them the truth, he would tell the judge the truth to-day. Perhaps the judge would only send him back to the workshop. But if he didn't? Well, what was the difference, he said in his hopelessness, between prison and workshop for a blind man? Very little. No, a lot. He would be cut off from voices, nobody to listen to, nobody to talk to, not even Broido. Broido his friend. No voices in the prison, no sounds of any sort. He would have nothing. He would just be able to make out where the window was, he could make out where the window was now by standing under it and turning his face up to the light—he supposed there were bars across the window. Funny having bars across the window and locking the door to keep a blind man in. Funny locking doors on anyone, one man locking a door on another. No, the workshop would be much better; he would hear the men talking, Richards, Meiring, even Broido. Surely the judge would send him back.

But if he didn't? Hans got up from the pallet on

which he had been sitting, sitting and waiting. No, they would keep him in gaol, shut him up, alone, and his ears and his tongue would be of no more use than his eyes. Better be dead. He was trembling, and suddenly the sweat was starting out on his skin. They might—they might do worse! No, no, he said, they wouldn't do that, they couldn't. But his knees gave at the thought, and he sat down before he should fall.

What was the time? No one had been near, though he had been awake a long while. It was of course dark, it was Winter, and daylight did not come till very late; on dull days he could not make out the difference between window and not window. Sometime it would be breakfast, and after that he would be taken to the Courthouse. He didn't want any breakfast. He had lived all these weeks in gaol and not been nervous; now the time was at hand he was nervous, uncertain, and his mind could not stop thinking. Yet he hadn't felt nervous before. What had he felt? A sort of resentment, perhaps, that Broido had gone and died on him? A sort of apathy, otherwise. Everything had flamed up on that one night, everything that could flame up, like a newspaper in a strong draught in the chimney, a blaze and it's out almost before you can feel the warmth. Whatever was in him had flamed up and gone out, leaving

him calm, normal, placid as before. Placid until he thought of what they might do to him.

He would soon know. This was the day of his trial. What was the good of being nervous, what was the good of thinking? These weeks in prison were empty, they were like an interminable dream of emptiness in which at the same time the past gradually receded to the smallness of a pin-point. Nothing from his past life had come to him since his arrest, none of the people that had made up his life had come to see him, not Mina nor Sophie, nor anyone; well, he hadn't wanted them to come; he had, in a way, done with them, long ago, only he had gone on living in the same house; not even Stephanie—he supposed they wouldn't have let her come, being in the case, for of course she would be in the case; for it was over her that he and Broido had quarrelled. And, somehow, knowing she couldn't come, he hadn't wanted her. There were things they would have to say to each other, when the trial was over. Broido had said things. And now there was Broido a dead man between them.

Yet supposing they had let her come to him, there in the cell, and he had heard her voice? What then would he have felt? Supposing they let him out and he went to where Stephanie lived in Bloem Street,

and she was in and he heard her voice and she let him put his hands over her face, push his fingers into her soft hair?—no, he had better not think of that. Broido had said too much, the dead man, with a mouth of lies, between them. Or not lies! What did he believe? And how was he to know? Was he ever to know? Even if they let him out, how was he to know? Nobody would tell him, Stephanie wouldn't tell him. She would laugh, and perhaps kiss him. The feeling that she might laugh and then kiss him was like a great white light in his head, a light, and there wasn't room for anything else. He was sure she was lovely. So much talk about pretty girls, the beauty of women, the lovely women that people saw on the screen, and he didn't know anything about it, he didn't know what they meant. He knew voices, Stephanie's voice, and the sensitiveness of his hands, touching her, playing over her, that was all. The softness of her skin, the long slow curves, yes, he knew, but only a little, not as he had known Mina. Yet how different from the feel of Mina, the feel of Sophie. They had come to him, not he to them, they had had a good time together, first Mina, and then somehow Mina had chucked him over and Sophie had come, she had come one night to his room crying in a silly sort of way. Well, Sophie was soft, they all said she was soft.

Anyway he had kept on with Sophie. And then one evening at the Pompadour Café he had heard Stephanie's voice, heard it so clearly when the wireless wasn't too loud, and he had got to know her. After that he hadn't wanted Sophie, neither Sophie nor Mina. Though Sophie had still been coming to him; habit, he supposed; a sort of habit, he said, whether you're married or not. But he hadn't wanted it, not after his friendship with Stephanie had begun.

Well, Stephanie was different.

And the pin-point of his life enlarging, as he sat inert on the pallet in his prison cell, awaiting his trial, waiting for his breakfast, it seemed to him that he had been very happy, a lucky fellow with such a girl as Stephanie, such as pal as Broido. Being blind didn't seem to stop one being happy, having friends. He had never, he remembered, been really unhappy in his life. Being poor didn't matter; people looked after him; he had his job at the workshop; he had a bed to sleep in, yes, and a room of his own rented from Mrs. Roos; he had enough to eat, people gave him clothes, he had a little money for cigarettes, coffees. A placid easy life, and his health was wonderful; never took any medicine; nothing ever wrong with him. No, he said, he had never thought about the future; why should he, what was the good? To-

day was enough, with Stephanie, Broido, the men in the workshop, old cackling Mrs. Roos who fed him well, treated him as a son, so much better than the people he used to live with. Not that they were bad, but they didn't really look after him, a dull lot, not like Mrs. Roos and Mina and even Sophie and all that crowd. Some life about them! And they liked his music. He was afraid Stephanie didn't like it, she never asked him to play, and anyway music was not so important when he was with her; it was her voice he wanted to listen to, not music, nor to make music.

Well, he had forgotten that if they shut him up he would have no music. That was another thing. He would have nothing. No music. Broido dead. No voices. And where would Stephanie be when he came out? He could, he supposed, go back to Mrs. Roos. Would they give him work again at the workshop? He didn't know what would happen to him, and, he said, he didn't care....

One day Broido had said to him, Man! he said, how you can stick those people I don't know.

That was when he was living with the Becks, sharing a room with two of the sons, he didn't like them very much and he felt that they resented his being there, but Mrs. Beck was decent to him, she was sorry for him, and old man Beck wasn't bad, a bit surly but

not bad, at least that was how he felt about them.

Oh, well, he said to Broido, they're not so bad. Got to live somewhere, got to live with somebody. It's not too good, but it might be worse. That, of course, was how he felt about most things.

And Broido said, They're tough. They're poor whites. They only want the money.

They need the money, said Hans.

So do you, said Broido. You got to be fed. You got to be looked after.

They do their best, said Hans.

Blast! I've got a splinter in my finger, said Broido.

Someone came and took it out. They were making baskets. There were often little accidents like that. Hans and Broido always sat together; on the other side of Hans there was a man called Richards and on the other side of Broido there was a man called Meiring. These two couldn't see at all, Hans scarcely at all, Broido only a little. Arm-in-arm the four of them used to go along the broad main street till they came to the turnings, the little streets where each man lived; Broido would take them all home; he could see just a little, the big dim shapes, the difference between light and shade, and he knew his way about. He was older than Hans, a big strong fellow. And he could talk. A metallic sort of voice, said Hans, but

it suited the things he said; he would have been a clever fellow if he hadn't been blind, would have got on, he had a grouse against the world for making him blind.

Still, he was a good friend to Hans. He always softened up a bit for Hans.

And one day he said, You've had enough of those Becks; they're no good; tell you what, I'll take you along to Mrs. Roos, they've got a room, they live in De Lorentz Street. Couple of girls there, too; you'll be more lively. Wonder I didn't think of it before.

Couple o' girls, you say? said Meiring.

Gawd! said Richards, fat lot o' use girls got for a blind bloke.

The conversation became general. It always did when you got talking about girls. Only you had to stop when the superintendent came in, she being a woman. And the slow laborious basket-making went on, the men making the baskets with unseeing hands.

Well, one thing, said he, to be blind is not to forget. He remembered everything, all the things that people said, and not only what they said but the things they meant to say, which came to him in the many shades of inflection, the modulations, the tones of their voices, when perhaps they did not know themselves that it was there.

A long way off the workshop seemed to him now, yet in a strange sense also immediately present, there in the prison with him. What sort of a picture was this that he had of the workshop, which he had never seen, compared with the pictures that a man with eyes would have? Not that he had no eyes, for when he was a little boy he had been able to see things; not very clearly and not for long. But it meant that compared with a person blind from birth he had an immense advantage. Even if now he could see nothing, he knew what seeing meant, he knew something of colours, he knew shapes, he knew what streets and rows of houses were, he knew shops and even trees, he knew, of course, people and what a face looked like. And none of these things, he said, can you know, no, you can't know them at all if you are born blind. Like Richards, for instance.

He knew why Richards had been born blind. And lots of others. Disease. Syphilis in the family. Well, there was nothing of that sort in his case; or was there? No, no, it was something else. In the company of the sightless, he said, Broido had been almost a rich man, and he himself not by any means poor, having once been able to see....

That very evening, after supper at the Becks', Broido had come to fetch him.

Come along, he said, we're going to Ma Roos. Shove your mouth-organ in your pocket.

The Becks lived in Fort Street. It wasn't far to De Lorentz Street. Broido had a room with a family in Bethesda Street. That was on the other side of Main Street, not very far from the sea. There was only the railway between, and a wide stretch of beach. Broido always knew what the weather was or was going to be from the sound of the sea, the beat of the surf on the treacherous white sand. Broido knew such a lot of things. He even liked the sea, wasn't afraid of it; he would cross the railway line and sit on the soft sands and listen to the sea and the wind and the calling of the gulls. There were a few fishing-boats, he told Hans, a little further along that part of the beach, and where the fishing-boats came the gulls came. Hans didn't like sitting on the beach and listening to the sea; it was the only thing of which he was afraid; he felt that the sea might so easily come and swallow him up. Can't you swim? said Broido, in a rough voice. Of course he couldn't swim. He had never seen the sea. He had only come to the coast after he had lost what little sight he had had as a boy; he just knew what water was, from the big dam on the farm where his father had a job, and he and his sister and his father and mother had lived in a little house of

unburnt brick very near the dam. And then in the terrible epidemic that came on the land about the end of the Great War they had all died, he alone in the house hadn't died, but he could by then no longer see things except as dim nearby shapes, and so he had been sent to the coast. People had looked after him ever since. Now he could not even see the shapes.

Broido sometimes played tricks on him, pretending to take him to one place and taking him to another, he was a great fellow for a joke. Hans didn't mind, only he never wanted to be taken to the sea. To-night, leaving Fort Street, he could tell that Broido wasn't taking him to the sea, so he didn't mind whether it was De Lorentz Street or where it was. But it was to De Lorentz Street. A warm still night, the pavements were yet warm, the air in the streets was stagnant, there were a hundred smells. He could tell almost all the little shops they were passing, say what they were, from the smells. The Chinese grocers, the Indian fruit-shops, the cobbler's, the Jewish butchery, the German baker, he even knew the smell that came from the front door, right on the street, of Mevrou van Buuren's boarding-house. Not so much a human smell, this, as a smell that humans have done with, something that they have left behind, mixed with wall-paper and old oil-cloth and uncir-

culating air. The Becks' house had its own smell, acrid, sweaty, but not stale; like the difference between warm sweaty clothes and sweaty clothes that have got cold; the Becks didn't often have baths, but neither, it seemed, did anybody else.

Broido, tapping only occasionally with his stick, said, We shan't be long. We're nearly there.

Hans, arm-in-arm with Broido, said, Do they like music? Shall I play to them?

When don't you play? said Broido. Look out, we're going to cross a road.

How funny of him, said Hans, to say 'look out'! That's because he can see, just a little; they all say that, when they can see.

Are they nice girls? he said.

Broido laughed. Nice enough, he said. Mina's O.K. Sophie's got a screw loose, he said, but none the worse for that. But you'll see. We turn up here.

Hans swung round on his friend's arm and they went up a little hill; they were shut in by houses, a narrow street, and houses both sides; Hans could tell that by the sound of their footfalls. Is it better than Fort Street? he said.

Fort Street's a bloody slum, said Broido. It's all a bloody slum.

Hans knew the word, but he didn't really know what the thing was. What was a slum? All he knew of houses was that they formed streets where people lived. Smells and sounds were part of the living, and people being together was friendly.

Is this De Lorentz Street? he said.

Right, buddy, said Broido, go up top.

They went slowly now, with Broido feeling his way with his left hand, touching the houses, a window or door, here and there, feeling for the right house. Suddenly he said, Here we are! and they stopped. Opening the door he called out, Anyone in?

At first a silence. Perhaps Broido has come to the wrong house, said Hans. He had a feeling of disappointment.

But no, it was the right house. A rich treacly voice called out, Man, is that you, Broido? Have you brought your friend?

Yes, Ma, said Broido, drawing Hans in by the arm, here he is, this is Hans Segal, a friend of mine. Hans, this is Mrs. Roos.

Pleased to meet you, said Hans.

That's all right, said Mrs. Roos, and taking his hand—he felt hers, they were the fattest hands he had ever known, and very soft—she pushed and guided him to a chair.

Why, she said to Broido, he's not much more than a boy.

Hans smiled. A good deal more than a boy, he said.

There was a pause. He felt Ma Roos looking at him. Then, It's a shame, she said, a downright shame. He heard her sit down in a chair.

Broido lit a cigarette. He gave Hans one, lighting it for him.

Mrs. Roos said—he liked her slow thick oozy voice—she said, The girls won't be long. I told 'em to bring back some fishanchips.

Hans could hear her breathing; he imagined her chest as an immense pair of bellows, though not so noisy. The boy's terribly thin, she said to Broido, don't they give 'im enough to eat?

Mean lot, said Broido. They take the money, though. A mean lot, I've always thought 'em.

He'd better come here, said Ma Roos—it didn't seem strange to Hans that they should talk about him like this—I'll feed him better than that. Whatever the money is, he shall have it, s' help me God he shall. And there's a room to spare.

He felt a sort of glow, inside him. What, he said, a room to myself?

Ma Roos laughed and laughed. Well, she said, and he could somehow feel her shaking with laughter, as

she managed to say, well, you—don't suppose you're going to share—with the girls? Not on your life. Keep a big stick for that sort of thing, don't I? she said.

Hans is all right, said Broido.

Anyone can see that, said Ma Roos. I do wish them girls would hurry up. You boys must be wanting a cup o' tea.

No hurry, said Broido. Ah, there's the girls, he said, though not before Hans had already caught the sound of footsteps in the street, a pair of high heels, loose slippers shuffling also hurriedly along.

Why, it's Bro, said a high-pitched girl's voice. How are you, ducky?

I'm all right, said Broido. This is my friend Hans. Hans, this is Mina.

Pleased to meet you, said Hans, getting up.

Now, no gettin' up, said Mina, shaking his hand. This is my sister Sophie.

He shook hands with Sophie. It was like shaking hands with a sort of dummy, her fingers had no life. Mina's hand gave him a sort of tingle.

Well, this is nice, said Mina.

Sophie, said Ma, go in the kitchen and put the kettle on. We're all dyin' for some tea. Did you bring the fish?

You bet, said Mina. Ain't it hot?

Yes, said Hans, it was hot. He liked this girl, he liked Ma, how different they were from the Becks. Was there a Mr. Roos? He didn't like to ask. But it soon came out that there wasn't. Mrs. Roos was telling Mina that Hans would be coming to them—if he wanted to—she was sure it could be arranged with the Society. Shan't know ourselves, she said, with a man in the 'ouse.

Mina was sitting in a chair near Hans. She touched his knee with her finger. Would you like to come? she said. We'll look after you.

Hans nodded. He meant that he would like to come very much, but he couldn't for a moment trust himself to speak. He didn't know why people should be so nice.

He heard someone just say the word Kettle! He supposed it must be Sophie; a queer muffled toneless voice it was that he didn't understand.

The next minute Mrs. Roos was going out into the kitchen, and Mina was saying to Broido, Well, what you been doing with yourself lately?

Oh, just muckin' along, said Broido.

Not much in the words, said Hans, but something strange in the voice. He felt that Broido was keeping something back. He felt a sort of tension between these two, it was something in the air. Mina's voice

too had a note in it as if it feared while it provoked, a sort of tremor under a hard bright sauciness. Either something was beginning, he said, or else it was ending. Broido shuffled his feet. Hans heard Mina leave the chair beside him and cross the room; there was a faint sound, and then a kiss, perhaps she was sitting on his knee, and it came to Hans from the sounds, a little whispering, that Broido didn't want her. Poor kid! he said, she's gone on Broido. Well, she wasn't the first one. Then, Oh, you brute! she said, and ran out of the room.

Hans said nothing. Broido was his friend. One didn't interfere in things like that, one asked no questions. Soon they were all sitting round eating the fish and chips and drinking tea. Mina was next to Hans; she kept on helping him. Have some more bread-and-butter? she said. Eat these chips, I don't want 'em. Sophie never said a word. Now, you girls, said Ma Roos. It was just a habit with her; he soon found that she meant nothing. Broido told them a joke or two. Presently he said they would have to be getting; he had to take Hans home and then go home to Bethesda Street himself. They said good night.

Going down De Lorentz Street Hans put his hand in his pocket and felt his mouth-organ; he didn't call

it his mouth-organ, he called it his music. Oh, he said, I never played my music to them.

Never mind that, buddy, said Broido, you'll have plenty of time....

Plenty of time, why, yes, for thanks to Broido it had all been fixed up, due notice given, and soon he was in his own room in the house with Ma Roos and the girls. What a difference! He remembered that first breakfast, he remembered everything. That was the beginning of everything, a different life, a life which had—wasn't it clear?—led him to where now he was. In prison. They called it murder. He knew it wasn't murder, but he wasn't a fool, he could understand that it would be difficult to explain. Perhaps other murders, and he had listened to lots being read out to him and his fellows in the workshop, local murders, murders also in the big papers like the *News of the World,* perhaps these were not really murders any more than his was a murder. The more he thought about that, the more true it seemed to be: no one wanted to murder anybody, one only wanted to stop them, to stop them!

Like that case little Miss Gray had read to them. She came often to read to them. He could tell she was little from the height her voice was at, and from the

sound of her voice, it would only fit a little person, it was soft which made the things she read, the thrilling things, seem somehow worse. Always going on, these things, yet you only knew of them, you only knew of those that got in the paper. Of course they were real life, but he didn't meet them in real life. And now he had made one, made one himself in real life. It was very simple, so simple that it would take hours to explain. Miss Gray's voice had made that case seem awful. There was a lot in a voice. He wondered what his own voice would do, making out his own case there in court. She had a soft voice, she dropped it almost to a whisper when she came to the horrors; they sometimes had to ask her to speak up; they didn't want to miss anything. Oh, you men! she used to say, but she read on.

There was that crime at the lonely railway-siding up-country, quite at the back of beyond, one train a day each way sort of place, mixed passengers and goods, a lonely place, not even a store-keeper there, only a few farmers came, fetching their sugar and coffee and meal, plough-parts, odds and ends, sending off farm produce, some cattle, a few bales of wool, cans of cream to the creamery. And at this siding a crime, and the paper said it was committed 'with every attendant circumstance of cruelty and horror.'

Miss Gray read it in a very low voice; it was about a woman. I don't like reading it, she said. The men said nothing. Hans could feel Broido at his elbow, breathing deeply. Richards was muttering something under his breath.

'The woman was found,' read Miss Gray, 'near the railway line, not very far from the signalman's hut. It was at first thought that she was knocked down by the north-bound train that passes that section of the line about ten o'clock every night. The woman's body was found by a ganger in the early morning; the train the previous night had been nearly two hours late.

'The police were telephoned for and were soon on the spot, travelling along the line by trolley. A short examination soon proved that the woman, identified as Miss Annie Brak and well known to the siding-master's wife, had not been touched by the train.

'A doctor, summoned by the police, travelled down by the day train and on his report the police have acted. The siding-master has been arrested.

'It appears that Miss Brak was savagely attacked and then, presumably, dragged on to the line, so that it might appear that her injuries were due to the train that was as usual expected at ten o'clock that night. There was blood on the track, also a trail of blood, showing where she had been dragged.

'It is assumed that she was then unconscious. But, recovering consciousness, Miss Brak seems then to have crawled, injured as she was, from the track to the grassy bank where she was found, dead, the next morning.'

How horrible! said Miss Gray. They could hear her rustling the paper.

Beats me how people can do a thing like that, said Richards.

Broido said, Well, it might've been the train. How do they know she was dragged on, if all they saw was the spoor of where she crawled off?

It's too horrible for words, said Miss Gray. Yes, said Hans, that's what she says; but she likes it, I can hear it in her voice. And he said, Are you coming to-morrow, Miss Gray?

Yes, she said, I'll come to-morrow.

They were all glad to hear her say that. And when she had gone they all talked about the case, only it wasn't a case yet. Some thought the train had done it, others were sure it must have been the siding-master.

Well, said Hans, here she is. I can hear her.

Yes, said Richards, fidgeting about on his chair, now we shall know a bit more.

I may tell you, said Miss Gray, sitting down, that they have released the siding-master.

Ah, what did I say! said Broido boastfully.

Yes, said Miss Gray, but it wasn't the train.

How do they know that, Miss Gray? said Hans.

The paper sent up a star reporter, said Miss Gray—why doesn't she hurry up and tell us? said Hans, he could hear in her voice that superior triumphant sound that creeps in when people know things that you don't know and they are telling you—and this star reporter has already sent down a long account. I will read it to you. You must try not to make too much noise with those baskets, she said, and she began to read.

'I arrived by the night train, which was one hour and seven minutes late. I inspected the track by the light of an electric torch, but judging that daylight would be better for an examination of the scene itself I proceeded to question the wife of the siding-master. Mrs. Bond was a close personal friend of Miss Brak.

'The affair, it is clear, has already taken a very dramatic turn. Mr. Bond was almost immediately released. As Mrs. Bond says, the police have to do their duty, but it was a great shock to her when they arrested her husband on suspicion of being concerned in the crime. Both she and Mr. Bond were very friendly with Miss Brak. They are greatly shocked by the tragedy, and the sinister light now thrown on it

by certain circumstances that have now come to light.

'The train theory may be immediately discarded. Blood-tracks were discovered on both sides of the line, showing that Miss Brak had been dragged on to the track from one side and had crawled off, or had been dragged off, on to the other.

'For some ten days previous to the crime Miss Brak had been staying at the siding with her friends Mrs. and Mr. Bond. She seemed well, but rather anxious. Most days she received letters brought by the south-bound train, and Mrs. Bond remembers that she wrote several. None of the letters that she received has been found.

'The nearest farm-house is a mile from the siding, and that evening after tea Miss Brak had said that she would go and see her friends at the farm, Mrs. Bond having a sick child to look after and Mr. Bond having to be on duty for the night train. Miss Brak said that Mr. Vestris would see her home. When she did not come home, it was thought that she had stayed at the farm.

'Miss Brak was never at the farm that night at all. She left the cottage at the siding at about seven o'clock, and never came back.

'Late this afternoon, a farm-boy reported to the

police here, that under a bush about three hundred yards from the road he had found a motor-bicycle. No one knew how it had come. No one owned a motor-bicycle in the district. Moreover its number-plate belonged to a town some three hundred miles to the North. The boy added that he had heard the noise of a motor-cycle engine the afternoon of the crime but he was working where he couldn't see the road.

'Telephonic communication has since then elicited the fact that the bicycle was stolen.

'One comes to the conclusion that the thief and the murderer were the same person.

'The police are working on the case, but the complete disappearance of the man, leaving it seems no clues of any sort, is causing great concern. Is he a homicidal lunatic wandering about the country-side, or is the murder of Miss Brak a carefully calculated crime?

'The motor-bicycle was railed back to its owner by the night train.'

When she was in the middle of the last sentence, Hans knew that it was the last sentence. No one said anything. Miss Gray rustled her paper and said she would read to them again to-morrow. They knew she was as excited about it as they were.

And when she came the next day she said at once, I've been so busy to-day I haven't had time to look at the paper yet. Let's see what they say. And she began to read immediately. It's still the same star reporter, she said; Hans could hear the note of excitement in her voice.

'To-day has been very hot. I have explored the district as far as it has been possible on foot. There are a few farms here, but they are very scattered. It is a poor district, very lonely, very bare. A stranger here could not hope to escape detection. No one can understand why it is that the man who killed Miss Brak should have come on a motor-bicycle—and left it behind him. There was petrol in the tank. The engine was in good order. How then did he leave the district?

'The roads have been scoured, farmers and farm-hands have been questioned.

'The police theory now is that he got away on the very train that went north that night—but not, as he supposed it would, over the body of Miss Brak. It is difficult to understand so callous a mind.

'If this theory is correct—and it is at least tenable, it was a dark night, he could have hidden himself in a goods truck—the man may have returned once more to the city whence he stole the motor-bicycle. Once

there he may judge himself safe. It may seem to such associates as he may have that he never left it.

'A dreadful feature is added to the case in the report from the doctor that Miss Brak was preg——'

Miss Gray stopped. They could feel her embarrassment. Hans said, Ah, if she had read it before, she'd have left that out; we shouldn't have known. It made him wonder how often she left things out.

When she went away, she didn't say a word about coming back. And she didn't come back, he remembered, for several days. They had had to get the rest of the story from the Pompadour Café, they had made that girl Magdalena read it to them. She hadn't cared what she read. Of course, they got the man, swine that he was, killing the poor girl because he didn't want it known he'd given her a baby, some of the men in the workshop said he was a mere brute, not fit to live, some said he was a moral coward, wouldn't face the consequences of his own acts, some said—and Broido was among them—that the girl must have done something, must have worked on him, driven him pretty mad. Hans didn't know. He couldn't understand anybody killing anyone. The man had got away by train. Nothing would ever have been known, but it so happened that the very letters she had written to him and the letters he had written to her—

these were stained with blood and it seemed conclusive that he had torn them from her—were found wedged, near the floor, between two heavy cases of machinery, parts of a printing machine, and either he had not noticed the loss of the packet when, perhaps hurriedly, he had left the goods truck, or else he had noticed the loss but had not been able to shift the cases to get at the letters. Hans imagined the state of the man's mind as he tried to get back the letters.

Well, there it was. No man could get off after that. Some of the letters were printed.

That wasn't the only case. But no, he mustn't think of cases. He remembered so many, remembered every word of some of them. And how all the men in the workshop used to talk.

Talk! said Hans. Why, everybody in the workshop would be talking about him, about his trial, discussing what he had done. Eagerly they would be waiting for people to bring them news as to how the trial was going. Would it last more than a day? he wondered. To-morrow they would all be on tenterhooks, because it would be in the papers—in the papers that neither he nor Broido nor any of the men in the workshop were able to read. So, they would have to wait until somebody came and read it to them, and

then they would be able to talk. He could hear them talking, as they went on with their chair-caning or their basket-weaving, doubly excited because here was a case about one of themselves. He remembered the endless talk, the wondering, the speculations aroused in these cases about people, people that you didn't know; yet as you heard about them, as you listened to the agonies, the terrors that they went through, you felt at last that deep down you knew them almost better than yourself.

And now he was one of these people, a man that the police would have been after if he hadn't just waited till they came.

Well, he had been through the worst. For days he had wanted to die. But now he was calm, calm on the day of his trial. Well, why not? He would show them that a blind man was not soft, he wasn't stupid.

Was it seven weeks, was it eight weeks since that rainy night when he had managed to get by himself from the workshop to the Pompadour Café, where he had told them that Broido had had an accident, that he had fallen down the stairs? He couldn't remember how many weeks it was; he could remember words, whole conversations, but he couldn't remember time —what was time? He hadn't told them that Broido was dead. Well, how could he know? Broido was

limp; perhaps he had concussion; he tried to lift Broido. He couldn't see, but he could feel that there was blood about. He could feel it on his hands, a dreadful feeling, and before going to the café he had felt his way along the wall to the wash-basin, and there he had washed his hands. Afterwards he had gone to the café, which was near the workshop, it was a cheap sort of Greek café, most of the men in the workshop were known there. They would have some tea or coffee or a soft drink or some fruit, there were thick substantial cakes for a penny, and smaller ones with icing on them; you could also buy cigarettes. They always paid for what they had, unless indeed, as sometimes happened, other people chipped in and paid for them. All kinds of people. Well, people were very good to the blind, but especially those who hadn't much for themselves.

Still, the Pompadour was a pretty rough place, compared with some others. There was a girl there called Magdalena, a sort of waitress; when the Greek wasn't there she ran the show; a hard case, they said, but Hans didn't know. Her laugh was like a tin kettle. She didn't care what she said. The Greek kept order. They said the Greek made her sleep with him, or get the push, but no one knew, that was the way people talked.

Well, he had gone into the café, the rain was beating down, he could feel it on his hands, hear it beating on his hat, beating down on the pavements, and he had said that Broido had fallen down the stairs. No one had said much. Then Magdalena, running in from the back with a cup of coffee, had said, By Chris', Hans, there's blood on your bloody coat.

Is there? said Hans, Is there?

His hands began feeling at his coat.

There were people round him. In the lighted café he could make out a bulk of shadow round him cutting off the light. That was the extent of his seeing. If there was a strong light he could make out the blackest shadows that came nearest him, between himself and the light. Daylight was for him just a foggy luminosity, featureless. At night he could tell where the source of light was. That was all. He heard the ugly voice of the Greek saying, Hi, you go fetch de polis....

Now he was in the prison, sitting on his bed, waiting for the hour of his trial.

The warder came in.

Here's your breakfast, Segal.

Oh, said Hans, what is it?

The warder told him, adding, I suppose you can

manage? The warder always said that. He had never had a blind man in the gaol before.

Oh yes, said Hans, I can manage. He felt the things over with the tips of his fingers, and after that he knew exactly where everything was; he never spilt anything. He began his breakfast. He felt he would like to talk to the warder, but he knew it wasn't any good; the warder wouldn't talk about the crime, about Broido—perhaps he wasn't allowed to. Hans ate his breakfast. How was it that he hadn't heard the warder go out? Yet he was sure the warder wasn't there. I say—he began, and stopped, listening. There wasn't a sound. Somehow he wanted to be sure, and getting up he felt along the four walls of the cell, carefully, he passed his hands over the locked door, moved slowly, criss-cross, about the cell. No, the warder had gone.

Well, said Hans, I didn't want him.

It came to him that if he wasn't on his guard he might say too much to the warder; things that they would use against him. No, it was too late for that. Had he already said things that he shouldn't? No, he said; and anyhow what was there he could have said?

He finished his breakfast, and sat with folded hands, as the blind sit, curiously patient.

CHAPTER II

But to sit and wait, not knowing what is going to happen to you, not knowing anything of the actual procedure that is in front of you is a sort of hell. He felt his mind racing, trying to think of several things at once, trying to go forwards and backwards at the same time. It wouldn't do. It made him feel sick, dizzy. He was in a prison cell, a strange place, comfortless, bare, yet he would have given anything, almost as never before, to be able to see. He would feel different if he could see. What was prison like, the cell, this narrow cell to which perhaps he would be committed for years and years? He didn't know, there was no one to tell him. In his old life Broido had told him things, simple vague things about the life around them, the streets, the moving scene. Broido had talked. Perhaps he had made up half the things he said. It didn't matter. Hans listened, Broido talked; they were friends; Hans was happy.

Then, too, it was Broido took him to stay with Ma Roos. That was the beginning of a new life. He could

see it all, no, not see it, he could feel, yet, no, he said, it *was* a sort of seeing. He knew the shapes and colours of things, of course he did, and when they said a round pink thing he could see vaguely a round pink thing in his head. So in the course of time he had in his head some sort of visual idea of the Roos house and household, and even if it was wrong it couldn't be all wrong. The house was full of sounds, half the floor-boards had a groan or a squeak, the kitchen door swung on its hinges with a slow rusty noise, the wind rattled the rings of the curtains perpetually; although there was a cat, which purred, there were mice, which made lots of tiny mouse noises in the dark. All these sounds spoke to him, for company; he listened for them only less than he listened for the jovial voice of Mrs. Roos, and her heavy fat breathing, or the shuffling of Sophie's slippers and her few words in a toneless voice, the words sometimes without meaning, or the quick movements and snappy talk of Mina and the something in the tone of her voice that seemed always to be asking a question. So much indeed, he said, yet no more than the groundwork for the constantly increasing knowledge that came to him of the Roos family, and of what was meant when people said that life was a wonder and a marvel. It was that, it was also much more; it

was, well, it was life, a thing he had known very little about before he went to stay with Ma Roos. It was only existence at the Becks', and before. Twenty-two years up to the time he went to De Lorentz Street, of which he had spent the first ten, with enfeebled sight, on the farm. So he knew what a dam was, and of course a house and also, more vaguely, a tree. Animals he knew better, because he had been able to touch them, to feel their shapes all over with his hands; he knew spades and other implements, he knew seeds, he understood what wheels were.

But he knew nothing of people. How was it that in the twelve years from his coming to the coast to his going to De Lorentz Street he had learnt so little? Only his friendship for Broido, and the give and take of the workshop; very little else.

Well, he knew now what it was, why he had known nothing; so much talk about women, and he knew nothing about them, nothing. How could he? What girl would want to have anything to do with him? He didn't understand how these others, blind like himself, should know so much. No, it hadn't bothered him. Broido made him laugh, though Broido, too, seemed to know so much. Broido would sometimes tease him, saying, Lord, when they get hold of you! You wait!

And that night when he had undressed, the boys were out, he had the room to himself, he felt his limbs all over, he passed his hands over his flesh, he trembled as his hands moved within his thighs, and he cried out, But I know! I know! He felt that he knew, but he could not say what it was. A great distress seized him, for how could such a thing as that happen, he said, to a blind man?

It was a couple of evenings later that Broido took him to see Ma Roos.

Well, it was time. He couldn't have gone on much longer with the starved existence, starved of everything at the Becks'. It wasn't their fault. Broido had helped him out of it in time. Broido had taken him to live with Ma Roos, to live with Sophie and Mina instead of the Beck boys. The Beck boys, he knew, had resented his being there, his sharing of their room; their parents got the money for his keep from the Society; they got nothing, only another fellow in a room already too small and crowded. They were foul-mouthed boys, always quarrelling, it wasn't a happy house, but they didn't often fight. And yet, said Hans, I lived there for three years. Had to. What else could he do, where else could he go? He had never imagined he could change, being put there by the Society, until Broido came along. Yes, Broido

had done everything, his friend, the man for whom he would have put his hand in the fire.

And feeling his hand, the one clasped in the other as he sat inert and patient on the pallet bed, he thought that, though it was true that he would then and at any time have put his hand in the fire for Broido, it was with the same hand that he had killed him. Because Broido was driving him mad, and he had to stop him, to stop him. Somehow there was no other way. Did he throw him over the iron railings on to the stone floor of the passage below, had he really hit Broido with an iron bar and knocked him down the stone stairway? He didn't know. How could anyone tell? No one else was there. Broido was twice as strong as he was, older, and self-assured—and he could see, just a little. It was foolish for them to pretend that he had done anything; all he had done was to try to stop Broido from driving him mad, about Stephanie, and then suddenly it had happened that Broido was not at the top of the stone stairway of the workshop with him but at the bottom, dead, and lying in a pool of blood. After trying to move the body, he had had to go up to the lavatory to wash his hands. The more he thought about it—and he had thought about it now for seven weeks, was it?—the clearer grew his conviction that actually it was an

accident. Yet at the same time he had intended it. He had meant to stop Broido, at whatever cost. He knew that. They would ask him a thousand questions. He had scarcely begun to think out the answers. Perhaps, whatever he said, they wouldn't understand. People that lived in the world of light didn't have the same thoughts, didn't, he felt, have the same way of thinking as those that lived in the dark world where he and Broido and Richards and those others had to live.

Perhaps, though, they would make allowances for him; they might even let him out; or only give him a short sentence for the look of the thing, a few weeks, three months, he didn't know; he had had now nearly two months, how slow they were, dreary, with nobody to talk to, nobody to read to him; how many more could he stand?

It was best not to think about it, if only he could stop thinking. He might go into court and say nothing, let them argue and decide, and afterwards serve his sentence, if there was one, and come out—and then?

He would know nothing of Stephanie. Would she wait for him? He would know nothing of the things that Broido had said, whether they were true or false. God, he said, wherever he had been, Broido had

been before him, he knew that now about the Roos girls, why not also with Stephanie? No one could stand up against a man like that, even if he was nearly blind; few men, certainly no women. Broido had only to laugh, and raise a finger. He had a sort of magic, said Hans, he could conjure the soul out. A dangerous man, yes, and not a moral man, yet he was my friend, he gave me everything, he made a something of life, he taught me. Deeper things than the preacher, more real things; the preacher had only a lot of words.

Broido had always a joke. Poor bloody blind men, he used to say, yet we have our little joke. He managed to live, he got something out of life, yet always, Hans recalled, there was an undercurrent of bitterness. He laughed at the idea of morals; get what you can, he used to say. At other times, talking to Hans, he would praise strength of character, abstinence, all the virtues. But not after taking Hans to De Lorentz Street. Yet, said Hans, somehow and for all that—for everything except Stephanie—he was a true friend. As for Stephanie, said Hans, I don't know; what can I say, what can I do, what can I think?

And again, as so many times before in these weeks in prison, when he came up against the thought of this girl his mind turned over; it was like a wave

curling and then crashing on the sands, his thought broke and ran up into the shallows, from a tension it relapsed and dissipated itself in smaller, happier memories, or thinkings, of his life before the crisis. His life now was not a life, it was the constant reliving of all that had gone on in the years of his consciousness, but especially the period that included Broido and Sophie and Mina and Stephanie and the life at the workshop and the recreations of his music and the times he had gone with one or another to the Pompadour Café, all now cut off from him.

He felt that he came nearer seeing the Pompadour Café than perhaps any other single place; he knew other places better, but he didn't exactly see them; but he did in a sense see the Pompadour. Because of the noise. It was the noisiest place. Noise made it vivid. There was colour in the noise, even shape. He and Broido were often there; that was where they bought their cigarettes. The gramophone scarcely ever stopped. Magdalena had to shout to be heard. You knew exactly where she was, she shouted everything in her voice like a tin kettle, her orders to the kitchen and her most intimate rejoinders to the fellows that teased her, pretending to get fresh, but only pretending because actually they were afraid of

the Greek. Magdalena feared no one, not even the Greek; and she knew everyone. Broido told Hans that the Pompadour had the most mixed crowd, even Portuguese. You heard a lot of languages, and a lot of language. There were girls there too. No one seemed to mind. Everyone had to shout, that is at the rush hours, but Magdalena was able to shout loudest. The Greek never shouted; he seldom said anything, not even thank you. When he spoke you felt a cold shiver, his voice was not human, it was sort of deadly; his voice was like a man coming round a dark corner, stealthily yet quickly, with a knife in his hand. The Greek never raised his voice, nor his hand, he never had a row; if there was a row, the Greek said three or four words and the man making the row went out into the street. Of course, there were rows, it was part of the noise, part of the scene that Hans made for himself of the Pompadour, part of the life that seethed and bubbled round its ten tables. Hans counted them, walking round, feeling his way, one morning before the crowd came in, when Broido was buying cigarettes. Some for four, some for six. Bentwood chairs with thin seats made out of one piece of wood with a lot of perforated holes; against the walls long seats with a sort of plush; linoleum on the floor; the cigarette and sweet counter on the right, and the

cash-register—he heard it every time it rang, even in the noise; a lot of fruit on the left of the door, also in one of the windows, oranges, apples, sometimes apricots and peaches, pineapples, and always bananas—he could smell them all, or most of them. They sold ices in summer. You had a big cup of coffee at the Pompadour. And pretty good. For a tickey.

But not so good as at Ma Roos's.

At the Becks' a cup of something that might be anything, not even hot, you only drank it because of the sugar, some badly made porridge, often burnt, and a hunk of bread and off you went to work, with another hunk in your pocket. Mrs. Beck made the bread; it was heavy stuff.

That first morning Mina banged on the door and called out that breakfast would soon be ready; but he was already dressed. She brought him a spot of hot water. Gawd! she said, can you shave yourself? Yes, he said. He had a safety razor. He shaved easily, by touch; he could see nothing; he could of course shave in the pitch dark; he never made a mistake.

You sit by me, said Mina: I'll help you. I suppose Broido is coming to fetch you?

Yes, said Hans, he always does.

Well, you're all right, she said; I shall have to buzz off in a few minutes. Sophie, she called in a high-

pitched voice, rather like an electric bell, where's the bacon?

Hans knew there was bacon, his nose had told him that; in his simplicity he wondered if they would give him any. Meanwhile he had his porridge, with milk and sugar.

Blast! said Mina: I shall have to fly.

You've got a couple of minutes, said Ma, coming in with the bacon. Eat this, and be off. And here's your lunch. And here's yours, too, she said to Hans, putting down a packet of sandwiches by his plate and making him touch the packet with his hand; he felt Ma's great fat body leaning against him, and her plump strong hand for a second on his. There's a bit of cold meat in yours, said Ma.

Well, ta-ta, said Mina; see you to-night.

Ma sat down in Mina's place. She took Hans's porridge plate and gave him some bacon and fried bread. The smell of the hot strong coffee at his elbow was almost more than he could stand, it took him back to the farm, to the little house near the dam and the hot strong sweet coffee that his mother knew so well how to make. He could hear Sophie shuffling about in the kitchen: he wondered when she would come to breakfast. But she didn't come. Ma said, Sophie's having hers: she may be soft, but she's a

good girl; Mina works in a shoe factory, gets good money, we do all right, we don't starve. And Ma Roos laughed a warm rich jammy sort of laugh, he could feel the chair shake, she had her arm along the back of his chair.

Another bit of fried bread? she said. Have some more coffee?

Hans shook his head.

Well, have a bit of bread an' marmalade, said Ma. I made it myself.

And getting up she cut some bread, and helped him to marmalade.

Hans felt he would never be able to get to work. What a meal! No wonder Ma was fat; and Sophie, as he supposed; he didn't know about Mina. She sounded a thin sort, thin and springy, but he didn't know, he couldn't see, and no one had told him.

He was glad when Broido came—he heard the intermittent tap of his stick before he reached the house, the front door was open, and the window on the stoop wide open—because he couldn't eat any more and Ma didn't seem to understand. You poor boy, she had kept on saying, you look 'arf-starved; them blarsted Becks has taken the money and starved yer.

Oh, well, he had said, the money wasn't much, and he had had bed and board.

Ma snorted—what does the bed cost? As long as you're 'ere, Hans, you'll get the money in your stomach.

And Ma put her arm across his shoulders resting her hand on his right shoulder, she was sitting on his left, and with her hand she felt his cheek, it was smooth, he had shaved clean.

Ma sighed. So you too got to work? she said. Well, get on with the bit of bread; I'll cut you some more. Strong young chap like you ought to eat.

Ma was very close to him. How kind she was! Yet somehow she was rather like a heavy blanket that had got round him and he didn't know what to do to throw it off, when Broido came.

Well, Ma kept her word. What money there was, from the Society, did go into his stomach. He wasn't a big eater: he had indeed to fight against it. Gradually he got Ma to understand that he could feed himself, all she had to do was to put things on his plate. He liked having Mina sit by him, when she only touched him he had a funny feeling, but he knew she only touched him accidentally, there was no purpose in it. But when Ma came and sat down in Mina's place, the chair always creaked as it took

her weight, he felt a bit embarrassed, he couldn't say why, he felt he didn't know what she might do next.

For all Ma's weight, and Mina's slimness—he found out later on that she was slim, firm and slim and tense —she and Mina were the same, they were both of them alive. They lived all the time, whatever they were doing. He used to wonder what gave them such vitality, and at the same time why it was that Sophie was what she was. She never came to breakfast. In the evenings he sometimes didn't know whether she was in the room with them, or in the kitchen or gone to bed; she seemed tongue-tied. But always he found that she was there, and presently he found that she wasn't quite so tongue-tied. Still it was plain that Sophie wasn't bright. You couldn't say she wasn't all there; she was slow; Mina had all the brains; Sophie, he supposed, was feeble-minded, it was a common sort of thing, but he didn't know much about it, he heard it said that it came from families marrying too much into one another. On the other hand, it might be something else, like Richard's blindness. There was, they said, a lot of it in the back country. He hadn't come across it, or hadn't noticed it; well, perhaps he wouldn't be able to; yet now that he saw the thing they meant in Sophie Roos, it didn't seem to him so bad as it had sounded. In a way, she was

like a quiet patient animal; and you didn't call animals dotty.

If she wasn't in the room when he played his music, in she always came, he could hear the way her feet shuffled, and though she didn't talk she sometimes made a few queer noises. Yet she could talk, but rather like a child that hasn't learnt grammar.

He hadn't been long at the house in De Lorentz Street before they found out about his music. He didn't tell them himself. Broido let it out, but in his usual joking way. There was a gramophone on. It wasn't playing anything with a tune in it. Ah, said Broido, you should hear old Hans here play the harp! Or is it the organ? he said, turning to Hans.

What, said Mina, do you mean to say that Hans can play things?

Of course he can, said Broido; they want him in the orchestra.

What sort o' things? said Mina, half excited, yet half annoyed at Broido making a mystery of it.

I told you, he said. The harp and the organ.

Well, we ain't got either, said Ma.

Broido laughed. That was what he wanted. But Hans has, he said; got 'em both in his pocket.

Oh, you're kiddin', said Ma, leaning back in the arm-chair, Hans could hear the noise of her stays.

Mina twigged it. She put her hand on Hans's knee and said, Cough 'em up.

And so from his pockets Hans extracted his Jew's harp and his beautiful mouth-organ.

Everybody laughed, except Sophie. Broido roared and Ma laughed and Mina gave a shrill giggle, but she soon stopped and said, Well, now you've had your joke play something.

She put her mouth to his ear and whispered, Something soft. You can play jazz presently. He felt her breath on his face, it was warm, it was a healthy breath. He put his beloved mouth-organ to his lips and gave them most of the tunes he knew, including a special version of his own of *Sarie Marais*. Mina was sitting beside him all the time; Sophie came and sat on the floor. Well, you can play, said Ma.

He can play anything, said Broido, anything you like.

They put a piece on the gramophone, and Hans played the melody; he could always do that.

Now a bit of rag-time, said Broido.

Hans did that. He played jazz on the mouth-organ and then he played Hawaiian airs on the Jew's harp, the falling cadences made them all sad, he could feel that they were really sad. He played a rumba on the mouth-organ. Mina jumped up and seized Broido

and they bumped a few times round the table. Hans felt that he himself would be able to dance if only Mina would teach him, someone he would be able to have complete confidence in. He picked up most of the tunes he knew from the gramophone in the Pompadour Café. The Greek bought a few new records every month, there was always the latest fox-trot or whatever it was. Hans never showed his mouth-organ in the café; he listened, and practised afterwards. He stopped playing the rumba, Mina and Broido soon gave up trying to dance, Broido was too clumsy. So he played a few tunes, classical selections, like they did on the Wurlitzer, with all the waggles, it was his star turn. Ma said he was simply wonderful.

Mina said she could listen to him all night.

Broido said, Well, didn't I tell you?

Oh, said Hans, a mouth-organ's all right, but what wouldn't I give to be able to play a real organ!

That was his dream. Well, there had been blind organists. But just a dream. And anyway he was happy with his 'music.' It made people so nice to him, so friendly. He could feel the warm friendliness of Ma Roos and Mina, yes, and even in a strange sort of way the warm friendliness of Sophie. She said nothing. He could hear her heavy breathing, feel a sort of straight animal warmth coming from her body close

beside him, almost touching his legs, on the floor. It made him think of the cowshed on the farm, it was more a shelter than a shed, where the few cows they had would lie on winter nights and the calves would be railed off so that they should not drink all the milk. As a boy his hand always went out to the cows, patting and stroking their great warm sides, but partly also to guide himself amongst them, whilst his father held the lantern. How huge they were! But he knew there was a reason for this; the cows were in calf, as soon as they had had a calf they would have to be in calf again; he was stroking the future calves. How simple it all was.

He stopped playing. In the thick warm atmosphere of the summer night—it was the third week in December, it would soon be Christmas—how lucky he was to have gone to De Lorentz Street in time for that!—he felt that he had never before been so happy. He couldn't say what it was that made him so. He put his music in his pocket, and his hand moving about after that touched something; it was Sophie; half unconsciously he let his hand rest on the warm softness of her shoulder, the warm rough stuff of her dress was akin to the ruffled hides of cows.

Then Broido had said he must be getting off home, back to Bethesda Street, he lived with some people

called Da Silva, Hans had never been there. But Ma said, No, he must have some tea first; of course they would have tea, and a bit of cake; she was sure Hans must be thirsty after all that blowing.

Mina said, I'll get the tea. She went into the kitchen. Broido went with her. Hans wondered what there was between Mina and Broido. He felt out of it. Ma got up from her chair and said, I'll be back in a minute. Hans was alone with Sophie. When he realised that his hand was on Sophie's shoulder, he took it away. She didn't move, any more than the cows.

Presently a few words came, her voice wasn't pretty, it was harsh, the harshness of not being properly formed, it seemed to him that there was something wanting. She said, She likes music.

Hans thought she meant Mina, or Ma.

Then he knew that she meant herself. He soon found that she spoke always of herself in the third person, like a child, yet she was a big grown lump of a girl, no, a woman grown and developed. To anyone else she seldom uttered more than single words, like kettle, dinner, raining. To him, very soon, she was talking in sentences of three or four words. They always made sense. Broido said she was soft, had only half her wits about her. Hans began thinking that

perhaps she was only sort of blind in her mind, like he was in his eyes; only that didn't quite describe it.

Play more music, she said.

No, said Hans, not now. Another time.

She flopped round, and was on her knees in front of him, pressing herself to him, her arms resting across his thighs. Not now? she said. Another time? It seemed to Hans she was trying to take the harshness out of her voice. But she couldn't do it.

He wasn't embarrassed; she was like a big dog at his feet, fawning on him, asking dumbly for affection. That was it. She somehow wasn't quite human. He leaned forward. Of course he couldn't see her, not even a dim shape; he could only see dim shapes close to him in the broad light of day. He put his hands up to her head; coarse hair not very tidy was what he found; he passed his fingers over her face; it taught him nothing. She had eyes, nose, ears, mouth, but no general shape of her face came to him; everything, it seemed, was flattened off into everything else; except her ears. They stuck out, her hair was neither short nor long, and went behind her ears. He made out that her mouth was open, a little wet at the corners; some of her teeth were broken. She said nothing, under the close exploratory touch of his fingers; she didn't move. When Ma came in again

she got up. Hans heard the shuffling of her slippers as she went out of the room.

At the Becks' he would have been in bed by now. No tea and cake at ten o'clock at night. Instead, he would have been half conscious, from long usage, of a dull want of something; he knew now that at the Becks' he never had quite enough to eat. Ma Roos gave him almost too much. Well, that was the way to live. The difference between what he now had and what he had been used to was beyond words; not only food, but comfort, companionship. And he owed it all to Broido. He wished he could walk over to Bethesda Street with Broido so that he could tell him; but he couldn't come back by himself. They had tea, and a piece of cake, and Broido went home.

That was the way of things at the Roos's. That first night that he had played his music—he had only been in the place three days—when Broido went he had got up to go to bed, Ma had said good night in her warm drawly voice, it was half a yawn, and Mina had taken him by the arm. She had done that from the first, taken him to his room, and said good night and said, Sleep well. To-night she did the same. Came to his chair and took his arm and led him round the table and down the passage and into his room at the back; his room had also a door into the yard; the lavatory

was in the yard. Mina took him to his room, but when they were in it she didn't say good night at once. She was a little different; he knew that, coming down the passage. You play fine, she said. He smiled. He felt a little boastful. Oh, he said, I know lots more. Real music? said Mina. Yes, real music, he said; Gounod's *Ave Maria,* and Mendelssohn's *Wedding March,* and Tosti's *Good-bye,* and *Land of Hope and Glory,* yes, and the *Bedouin Love-song.*

Well, she said, I don't know how you kin do it; and you blind.

Music just goes on in my head, said Hans.

It's a shame, said Mina, you being blind. No one would think so. It's a sin and a shame. A sort of waste.

It came to him later, but not then, that by waste she meant that only his blindness prevented him being a proper man. Of course he had no idea as to what he looked like; no one had told him.

Suddenly Mina came close to him and put an arm round his neck and kissed him. He hadn't time to do or say a thing. He heard the door closing, she was gone.

He heard her shouting, Come on, Sophie, bed-time. Ma said, in the passage, My Gawd, that young feller can play. Sophie shuffled along. Mina said, Where the hell—but a door banged and he didn't hear where

the hell what. But he heard the sound of movements, of shoes being dropped, doors opening and shutting, Mina's voice and Ma's answering each other out of their rooms—Sophie slept with Mina—all sorts of sounds, and he amused himself by trying to make out what they were. Then at last silence. No one came to turn out his light because they never turned it on, the dark was the same to him as the light; he folded his clothes and put them in a careful pile on a chair, he said his prayers, he went to bed.

He did all this, that night, in a sort of dream. He wondered why Mina had kissed him. No one had ever done that before, just up and kissed him, for himself, without asking. No rough stuff. Just being kind. The tears were very near.

He almost got out of bed again to put Broido in his prayers. For bringing him to De Lorentz Street. He didn't know then, he said, what he learnt later. Yet when he knew he had to say, in his heart, that, hell, it didn't matter; he had been a happy fool; he was happy still, but not a fool; he had learnt to live; the very best turn Broido had done him was to make a man of him. Or did Mina do that?

She kissed him the next night, and the next; but she was always too quick for him; not that he tried to get hold of her, he was afraid she might resent it,

might not come back. Then she said, Don't tell Bro. Nothing more. Why? He remembered the kiss, the tussle, whatever it was, between Mina and Broido that night of his first visit. Was there anything between them? Oh, hell, of course there was. He knew there would have to be. Broido was so bold, so strong, he was such a fine man, except for his eyes, and he could talk, could make women laugh. Oh, he could do as he liked with women. Hans knew that. But he could never get out of Broido the facts, whether it was this one or that, how far he went. Broido only laughed, he said, It wouldn't be good for you to know, fellow. Poking fun at him. And Hans had laughed, too.

But this was different. This was nearer home. Broido came to De Lorentz Street to fetch him, and walking down to the workshop—they were to call for Richards, as usual—Hans said to him, Broido, is Mina your girl-friend?

He felt Broido stiffen a little in the arm, but the laugh came, as he knew it would, a long, loud laugh. What, that little bitch? he said. Ten to one, Hans, he said, she's setting her cap at you.

Hans said, simply, She kissed me last night.

Broido didn't laugh at that. He seemed to be considering. The hell she did, he said; well, it might be

worse. Buddy, he said, you better watch your step.

They didn't say any more. But Hans knew that Broido hadn't answered his question. He still didn't know what Mina had been to Broido, or Broido to Mina. Well, it didn't matter; he did know that Broido wouldn't come between them; though other people might, or other things.

And Broido didn't. Nothing did. Broido, he now knew, had merely passed on. Well, and didn't he too pass on? From one to another? Or was passed on? All in the day's work, said Broido, though when he said it Hans had not understood. Broido could change his mood so easily. They picked up Richards; he was waiting for them outside a Chinaman's shop; a small girl from the house where Richards lived, where, like many of the others, he was boarded out, had brought Richards down the steep street—at the top it was actually steps in the rock of the hillside—to the Chinaman's shop in the main street, and there they picked him up, and Broido, dimly seeing, with Hans on one arm, and Richards on the other, marched them off, in the strange, stiff manner of the blind, to the workshop. Broido hummed a tune, and they kept step to it. It was a tune he had heard, or had made up, and to which he had put funny words, rather bitter words these were, thought Hans, because

being blind, take it all round, wasn't as bad as it sounded. But Broido made it bad and bitter when he made up the words of the tune to which they now marched. The words were something about three blind mice. Hans had heard that English children had it as a nursery rhyme; he was sure that it must be different from the way Broido had it, for every second word in it was bloody, or worse.

That day, in the workshop up the flight of stone stairs, they were caning; a big order had come in; Hans never knew where all the caned chairs went to. Where do they go? he said. Who sits on them? What do they pay for them? Do they know that blind men do them? He asked himself these questions over and over again as he sat caning the seats of chairs, his fingers pushing and pulling the thin split canes through the holes. You had to put the cane through the holes in a certain way, you can make a pattern, it was a little like basket-work, only the diagonals were more important, the superintendent came round to see that you were doing it all right. Well, it kept you busy, gave you something to do; only you could talk more at basket-making. It was easier to go wrong over caning, if you let your attention wander. You were glad when lunch-time came, and you could stop and talk and eat whatever you had. He had so

much now that he shared with Broido; he and Broido shared what they both brought, and mostly now they were able to give something to Richards who sometimes had nothing. Richards never asked. He often had a pain inside, but he couldn't put his finger on it; he was born blind; he used to say that the only good thing you could say about life was that it ended. Meiring was religious; he wouldn't have that; he said there was a reason for it all. Hans didn't know about there being any reason. Meiring stuck it because he was religious; Richards stuck it without being religious. And Richards had the pain; no one knew what it was. Sometimes there would be the four of them, coming and going arm-in-arm; sometimes only the three of them, when someone else would call for Meiring.

CHAPTER III

He was thinking of sin. What was it? What was evil? He didn't know. Whenever he came to think about it, in all these weeks in prison, his mind went round and round. He never gave it a thought before they brought him to the prison. He heard talk about sin, evil, but it had never touched him. Sin seemed to be just what people happened to say it was. He had no sins on his conscience. Evil had seemed to him to be only not being happy. At least, that was what it came out of. He had never really been unhappy. Things happened, the plague after the war, and thousands of people had died, in all his family he alone had not died, had not even been sick, and so he had come to the coast-town all the way from the farm for others to look after him. But he wasn't unhappy, his blindness had not made him unhappy. People were good, even the Becks. Always there was a helping hand to a blind man. No harsh words. How could he know what evil was?

He told no lies, didn't have to; he didn't have to

struggle to keep alive; being blind he could have no ambitions, he need only live from day to day; like the flowers they told him of. And he didn't only live. Hadn't Broido come into his life, giving him friendship, waking up his mind, giving him another life? Yes, and from Broido had flowed everything else, Ma Roos, Sophie, Mina. A happiness he had never known before. Laughter. Jokes. Whisperings. And presently the ecstasy of holding Mina's slim body all night in his arms. Sin?

Oh, hell, he said, shifting slightly on the pallet bed, oh, hell. Of course that wasn't sin. How could happiness be sin? Doing no one any harm. No, he didn't know what sin was. But it was different from what people said. This prison was a sin. And Broido? Was that a sin? What he had done to Broido? Killed him! A sin, yes, yet in his heart of hearts he felt that for him it was no sin; he had to do it, he had to stop Broido. Then was what Broido had done a sin? Well, for him it was a sin, taking away the good name of Stephanie, but perhaps for Broido it wasn't. Perhaps Broido knew. That was the terrible part. That was where evil came in. The only real bit of evil he had met in his whole life. Perhaps they wouldn't understand that. It seemed that there were fixed ways of looking at things. The Bible was all right, but very

confusing. Thou shalt do no murder, it said—as though anyone would want to do murder. He hadn't wanted to. But it also said an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth. Well, Broido had tried to kill his idea of Stephanie, so he had killed Broido; he had only really wanted to stop him.

How would any preacher fix that? He had listened to the preacher in church; they in the workshop used to be taken, half a dozen at a time, to listen to the preacher on Sundays; Broido would never come; the superintendent herself used to take them; they never walked very easily with her, there was a lot of stumbling. She meant well, but she didn't understand the way to help them without fussing; because she did fuss. She made them strangely self-conscious as they went with her through the streets, the different Sunday-like streets, and even a bit self-conscious in church, not composed and tranquil as usually they were. They all felt this, and used to talk about it; they never to each other questioned the Church nor what the preacher said. Yet perhaps, said Hans, they all questioned it even as he did, not violently but quietly and deep within. The preacher had so much to say about the evils of the world and the sins of mankind and the awful judgment of God. Awful indeed if God's chief idea of judgment was to put

people in hell. Hans couldn't see it. He couldn't see the evils of the world; he said to himself that it was a lot of words.

If it wasn't a lot of words, what a terrible day was that Christmas that came so soon after his going to Ma Roos's. The happiest day that up to then he had ever had. Packed full of sin. Packed full of singing and swearing and people kissing each other and eating a lot and getting pleasantly drunk, and then Mina——

Only one Christmas like that. There wouldn't be any more. All silliness and being happy. They said he was only a boy, only a kid. Mina had come in and hung up his sock, she pinned it to the edge of the mattress, through the blanket. Oh, he heard Ma come in all right; he trembled a little when she came to his bed and he heard her fumbling with the sock, stuffing things in; she was trying not to make a noise, trying to breathe quietly; then she put a hand on him, in the dark of course, and he lay perfectly still; he didn't know what she might do; he was conscious of her great bulk, he could smell the warmth of her on the left of the bed as she stood there a moment with her hand on him before going out of the room. He was relieved when he heard the door close. He knew why. Yet what would it have mattered? He was only, as

Broido said, a poor bloody blind man. Oh, hell.

Yet it was kindness, not the other thing, had brought her there to fill his stocking. Ma Roos. He went to sleep without so much as touching it....

It had an orange, an apple, some dates and some nuts, a few sweets. He found them and ate them before anyone else was awake. Then he put on his trousers and shirt; he would have to wait till they came with a little hot water for him to shave, how nice if he could only get it himself! And sitting there waiting for them, waiting for Sophie, as it always was, to bring the hot water, he ate the nuts and sweets and wished he had something he could give them in return. But he had nothing; he had no money to spare; his shoes needed repairing, other things; besides a few cigarettes; what little money he earned only just did. If only he had a few shillings that he dare spend; something for Ma, something for Mina, something for Sophie.

A bang on the door. It was Mina. Oh, you're up, she said; merry Christmas, Hans. And shutting the door she came over and kissed him. Mina, he said, getting up. She laughed, but not loudly. Her voice was softer; there was more in it of the flute than the hard bright trumpet. Wait a bit, she said; wait a bit.

Mina, he said, I wish I had a little present for you.

Do you? she said. Well, I've got something for you. So has Ma. You mustn't mind Sophie; she's got no money.

I'm sorry for Sophie, he said.

Oh, she's all right. We'll have a party to-night. Ma says you must come to breakfast. You can shave after.

Mina went to take him by the arm to lead him round the bed and to the door. He put his arms round her and kissed whatever part of her touched his face; it was the loose soft hair of her head; she only giggled; but the smell of her hair, recently washed and waved or whatever, and the feel of her body in some sort of a loose wrap, she too hadn't dressed yet, nearly did for him. Mina! he said. But they had moved towards the door, and opening it Mina called out, Here we are. Hans has eaten all his sock. Ain't breakfast ready?

But it was eating all day. Eating and talking and laughing and people coming in, he couldn't help perceiving that his being at Ma Roos's lent a new interest in the Roos family, they took also an interest in him. He it was, the man in the house, that made a new centre, and a blind man at that. All morning he sat in a chair on the narrow stoop; the sun was hot, but he didn't mind. People came and talked to him; Mina dashed in and out, it didn't seem she could

keep still; Ma was busy in the kitchen, Sophie too. Marvellous smells were coming out of the kitchen.

Broido came up the little hill of De Lorentz Street and sat on the stoop with him. He didn't stay long; he was coming to the party in the evening. Mina came out while he was there. They talked. Hans felt there was antagonism between these two. But already different. Mina didn't now seem to care. Broido was going. But Ma came out and said they must all have a glass of wine, on Christmas morning. And a biscuit; she had made some sweet cookies yesterday. The Barnets came in at that moment, a young married couple, Hans was told, two or three years married, but no children; it was said they had modern ideas. Lucy Barnet's voice was a dull toneless thing, Tom's was a booming sort of bass but tuneless; Hans formed the opinion, from their voices, that they were not happy.

Over the wine and the little crisp cakes they talked and it happened that Hans said he wondered what poor old Richards would be doing. Poor man, said Ma; Bro, you bring him along; bring him up with you this evening. Lucy here's coming, and Tom. We'll ask a couple o' girls from where Mina works, eh? That'll make about ten of us; can't get any more in.

Ma got up and rolled off to the kitchen; Lucy and Tom went away, saying, See you some more; Mina said she was going along to ask Norah Jackson and Molly Beyers; Broido who had said he was going didn't make a move. Hans sat and waited for Broido to say something; he felt that there was something that Broido wanted to say. But if there was, it seemed he didn't know how, which was strange, for old Bro coughed it up all right, he usually didn't care a bit what he said. He found himself listening for the slightest word from Broido, with the almost certain knowledge that it would be about Mina. But no word came. Broido said he would bring old Richards along, and after that Hans heard him feeling his way off the stoop, and a few taps of his stick and he walked away.

Allamatjies! it was hot on the stoop, but he didn't mind, he hadn't a coat on or a collar, though, of course, he had shaved. He put his hand to his braces, they were a new pair, Ma's present to him, she must have noticed how poor his old braces were, all tied up with string. Here you are, Hans, she said with her fat jolly laugh, something to keep yer trousers up; we're modest women, we are.

And Mina had given him fifty cigarettes. He had never had fifty before, only packets of ten at a time.

Not that you got much out of smoking; and he couldn't light one himself. But how happy he would be if she would smoke them. She had said she hadn't known what else to give him; he felt that he could have told her.

He could feel now, in the chill prison, the warmth of that Christmas morning, only last Christmas, beating on him, enveloping him, as he sat alone on the stoop in De Lorentz Street. It was so hot, that even his thoughts were liquid; but he didn't mind. The front of the house faced the sun almost all day. One sat and sweltered. It was nearly midday. Nobody was out in the street, only a few children; he could hear them shouting and playing games; up at the top of the street, some way off. It was otherwise quiet, like Sunday. It was always changing; Saturday night was the noisiest, but Friday ran it close; a lot of people were paid on Friday; the shops stayed open, many of them, till nine o'clock on Friday; the bars did a big trade. He didn't go into bars, he went, when he could, to the Pompadour because they knew him there and it was nice to go where you were known. He had, sometimes, been into a bar with Broido and had a beer; he liked the beer; but not the sort of noise in the bar, it was something he didn't understand; and there was no music; in the café there was

always the gramophone or the wireless. Besides, in the bar it was always only men....

He heard the shuffling of Sophie's slippers; she came out on to the stoop; no one else was there; he felt her heavy damp hands on his, she was opening one of his hands, and in it she put a coin, it was half a crown. He didn't know what to do; he didn't want half a crown from Sophie; but he couldn't do anything. Christmas, she said; and went away. Hans sat there with the half-crown in his hand, wondering what to do.

Presently Mina came back.

My Gawd, she said, it's blasted 'ot! And you sitting in the sun. They ought to've took you in.

I don't mind, he said.

Mina seemed anxious about him; she seemed to feel that they were neglecting him.

Like me to take you in? she said. It's cooler inside, though it's dark with the blinds down: but you don't mind the dark.

He held out his hand.

Look what Sophie gave me, he said; I think she didn't ought to.

Mina, he supposed, looked, for with a sudden sharp exclamation she said, What!

Then, with a sort of surprise which she tried to

conceal, she said, Oh, she gave you that, did she?

Hans felt that he knew what Mina's surprise meant. Poor Sophie, he thought.

Mina, he said.

Yes?

Did Sophie have a half a crown?

Mina came and put her hand on his arm. He didn't move. She said, in a low voice, Now, you put that in your pocket, Hans.

Mina, he said, I know it wasn't Sophie's, was it yours?

She laughed, a quiet sort of laugh, not like the big noisy laugh she mostly let out, and said, You want to know too much. Anyway it's yours now, and nobody ain't going to take it away from you.

I'm sorry for Sophie, he said.

Mina said, You're a nice boy, Hans. Don't you worry about Sophie. She's all right.

The half-crown was still in his hand; it seemed to him a sort of treasure; he would never be able to spend it; perhaps he would give it away, maybe to Richards who always seemed to him to be worse off than himself. But how strange a thing it was that Sophie should have stolen it, to give to him, and if anything was a sin stealing was, except from those that had so much, yet he couldn't consider it a sin.

Sophie had had to steal it; he could feel that; nothing could have prevented her; just as he had had to kill Broido, and nothing could have prevented him.

Well, there was Christmas dinner; just the four of them; the family. He was part of the family. Every family had its Christmas dinner to itself; hot; at about half past one. They had a fowl, and some sausages; his plate was so full some of it fell on the cloth. They had plum pudding. They poured brandy over it and struck a match; he could smell the burnt brandy, the burning of the pudding. And there were mince-pies. And raisins and nuts and some fruit. And some sweet wine. When had he had such a dinner?

When the washing-up was done, Ma said she would have a lie-down. There was plenty for the party; most things were ready; Norah Jackson was going to bring some of her records; everybody was coming at about seven; what was Hans going to do until then? Hans didn't know. Without the workshop it was always difficult to know what to do with one's time. Dozing was horrible; all right for old people; he would have liked a walk with Broido, only Broido wasn't there. He didn't like to ask Mina. She had taken him once to the bottom of the street; he had an idea that she didn't care about it; perhaps she didn't

care about being seen piloting a blind man about the place; people might stare; she was a girl, of course she would have her boy-friends. In fact, what didn't she have? What about Broido? He wondered what she looked like, was she pretty? And what did they mean by pretty? What again did they mean by ugly? He wondered, was Sophie ugly? He knew about sounds, there were pretty voices, not many, and ordinary plain voices and ugly voices. There was even ugly music as well as pretty music, stuff that he didn't understand at all. But when it came to shapes, when it came to faces he was at sea; what was the difference? He remembered trees, for instance, but trees were trees, there couldn't be a difference in trees; the few faces that as a child he had known, his mother's, his father's, his elder sister's, held nothing in his dim memory of them of either quality. Of himself he knew nothing, yet the world was full of the talk of beauty; he felt that really there must be very little ugliness; sometimes they would ask to have the advertisements read to them out of the paper, it seemed to bring the life of the town home to them; well, in the advertisements everything was wonderful, wonderful houses, beautiful furniture, even attractive umbrellas and adorable bed-spreads. Oh, he wasn't so simple as not to know that a good deal of

this must be allowed for as the talk of advertisers. On the other hand, nobody got up and said that as a matter of fact these things were ugly. Then too the lovely women, the stars of Hollywood, the chorus girls even were lovely. If only he could see for himself; he wanted to know what it all meant; everything that everybody said about beauty seemed to be a judgment of the eye. For him it had to be the ear, only the ear.

With a sigh he gave it up; he didn't usually worry about these things; perhaps it was too much Christmas pudding; perhaps, again, it was Mina. Was it Mina? Was it because he thought she wouldn't like it if he asked her to take him for a walk? No. He could understand that. Yet it was Mina. He was conscious of her as how could he not be conscious of her, a girl, sitting beside him at meals, helping him when it was difficult, being kind to him, kissing him good night? A girl with two voices, the hard bright clash and snappy talk of everyday, and the softer sweeter voice, low-toned almost to a whisper, in which she had now begun to talk to him. A girl who had turned from Broido to him? No, she had done with Broido, but the rest was nonsense; she was only being kind.

It was not so hot on the stoop now; the sun was at last off the corner of the stoop where the partition

was, dividing them from next door. Ma and the girls had gone to lie down; Mina had taken him to his room, but he was restless, he hadn't stayed there. He had very quietly felt his way to the stoop, and the hot sun. The street was absolutely quiet, not a sound. He sat and let his thoughts wander. The hours are long, he said, yet they go. To sit still and do nothing, at his age, well, it was the devil. He wished Broido had been coming; he would ask Broido to take him for a walk to-morrow. It was bed and board at Ma's; he mustn't ask too much; they were awfully kind.

There was a faint sound on the stoop. Well, it was Mina, with bare feet; she came and sat on his knee, there was only one chair then on the stoop; Oh, Hans, she said, fancy leavin' you alone like this all afternoon.

That's all right, he said. He didn't move. Mina mustn't get off his knee. He wished he knew what was the right thing to do, what he could do to keep her there.

Mina said, Ma says she and Sophie can manage, Ma says why don't I take you out. Would you like to be took out? What about takin' the tram and going along past the Tronk to the Park—it ain't far?

Hans' heart was so full he didn't know what to say. The very thing he thought Mina wouldn't do, would

perhaps be ashamed of. He said, he didn't mind where he went.

But you'd like to go? she said.

He'd like it fine. But did she want to?

You and me will just go to the Park, honey, she said; after tea. Ma's gettin' some tea now. Don't say a word about the 'arf-crown Sophie gave you. She stole it from Ma; but Ma won't never know.

Mina laughed, and suddenly she was gone. She was no weight at all, he thought. From the door she said, I'll fetch you for tea in a coupla minutes.

He was in his room. Mina came and tied his tie. Quite the beau, she said. And at tea she said, me and Hans is going to the Park. Her voice was at the very highest pitch; a little more, and it would crack; he felt she didn't give a damn about any damned thing. She was two people, and being two people was at that time all new to him and he didn't understand. Now he understood that everyone was at least two people; he was two; but when you understood deep enough you found the two became only one.

Mina was so easy, she talked so much, that going down De Lorentz Street with her he was all right, he wasn't nervous, as he had supposed he would be. He was so used to Broido taking him, and sometimes some other man. He couldn't remember when a

woman had led him; except sometimes the superintendent, and then not alone; but she didn't count. Mina's guidance was a new experience; she seemed to know just what to do, how to help him. He wondered if this looking after him wasn't like being a nursemaid to some kid. He flushed at the thought. Probably it was so. His hand stiffened in the crook of her arm.

They sat in the tram, and she told him about the people, the other passengers, said what they looked like, described them to him. Not in her hard electric voice as at tea, but in the low-toned whisper that he liked. She said the conductor was a nice fellow; she knew him; he had a moustache. The tram-driver, she told him, was a big fellow with a face made of leather and tiny eyes. She stopped when she said eyes. He knew she was thinking she shouldn't have. He said, I don't mind you talking about eyes. What colour are yours? Blue, she told him. Well, I know a little what blue is, he said; it's the sky colour. I could see the sky when I was a kid. You must have been a nice kid, she said. We're passing the Tronk now. I wish you could see the old girl who's just got in.

She told him about the old girl; old fish-face, she said, you should see her hat. She couldn't help talking about seeing. He didn't mind; he felt it helped

him a bit, in some strange way he couldn't make out, helped him to see, to form some vague misty idea of what seeing would be like now. The people in the tram, she said, were old fish-face, and two young coloured men in bright shirts, going to see their girls, she said, though of course she didn't know, and a warder from the Tronk going home, and a man in a blue suit and another man who sat in a corner with his hat over his eyes, she said he was boozed, and three coloured girls with their best hats on and silk stockings, she didn't know why they paid these shirt-hands so much, white girls didn't get so much more, some of 'em didn't get any more, it was a shame.

People got in and out; not a lot on Christmas afternoon; she described them all; the tram was always stopping and starting and the bell clanging; she told him the bell that clanged for people to get out of the way was under the driver's foot. She told him it was a two-decker tram, with a stairway up and seats on top for lots more people. But it was chiefly of the people that she talked. Nothing like this had ever happened to Hans before; Broido had never told him about people, but then Broido himself didn't see; it was wonderful beyond words, being with Mina. The way she talked brought him right

into the middle of a world of people; here was life going on round him, and himself a part of it; no longer circumscribed by the workshop, the café and the narrow half-kind, half-bitter circle of the Becks.

Well, here we are, she said; we're at the Park. We get off here. You take hold o' my arm....

That was a day. Hans got up from the bed and felt his way round the cell to the cell door, he didn't know why. The Tronk. The prison. He touched the door and went back to the low pallet bed. Things in his mind were hurting him. Nobody but Mina had ever taken him to the Park, their own little Park, belonging to their end of the town, the workers' end, nobody but Mina; not Broido, not even Stephanie; Stephanie took him places but not to the little Park. He had to be fair; Stephanie had come, she had driven out Mina; only in a sense had she driven out Mina; but it was Mina took him up first, let people see her with him in the street, taught him things, taught him, he said, everything. That was why when Stephanie had come that he knew so much; he wasn't any longer a kid. He owed it to Mina.

They were in the Park. She said there were flowers and trees and some grass and a lily pond and a fountain, but he couldn't put these things together. The

pond was water, and he knew about trees; he felt the grass with his hand, it was strange to his fingers; there had been no grass on the farm. She told him the flowers had lovely colours, all sorts of mixtures, but he didn't understand. If only flowers had voices, or made sound like animals. He could tell that she felt she wasn't helping him much. Yet she was; he wanted to tell her so; but there was such a lot of new stuff to try to take in. They walked about; he could feel the gravel under his shoe. Mina said there was hardly anybody in the Park.

Oh, she said suddenly, the birds; Hans, can you hear them?

Yes, he said, he could hear a lot of twittering. And the quick sound of wings. What are they, Mina?

She told him. She said, Well, there's a lot of willow trees here. They hang down. And at the ends the birds have their nests. They're weaver-birds. Some of them are doing the nests now; weaving them, it's just like a sort of sewing; the hole's mostly at the bottom; they get in their nests and they can't get wet. Oh, it's wonderful, really, and the noise they make! Must be hundreds of 'em here.

Hans could hear the noise. He was glad of Mina's talk. So quick and lively, but he couldn't help some-

times having a feeling of sadness, almost of despair, at the things which could have no meaning for him without sight. Not even out of his dim young past could he manage to form any picture in his mind of what she was telling him; about the bird-weavers, say; it was better when she told him about people. Best of all, of course, was her companionship, a girl taking the trouble to lead him, to talk to him; a girl that seemed to like him.

They found a bit of shade under some trees; there was a rough sort of grass; he could tell that the sky was still bright. Mina said, Let's sit down.

His brain seemed filled with a strange sort of pink light. They were lying together under the trees, and Mina's head was resting on his shoulder; she was turned towards him, he could feel her knees; she was touching his face with her fingers, gently, drawing her fingers down the line of his profile, from the point where the hair grew on his forehead down his nose and his mouth and away to under his chin.

Do you know what a nice-looking chap you are, Hans?

No, he didn't know a bit what he looked like.

Well, you are, she said.

They were silent. Hans knew what he wanted. Of course he did. But what could he do? He was poor,

and blind. She liked playing with him. He had to hang on to himself to leave her alone. Well, she would think him a clod, a person with no guts, a mere kid.

He turned over on his stomach; he had to; he wasn't going to have her see, he wasn't going to have her see his embarrassment. It was a torture.

Hans, she said with her bright laugh, he could tell she was sitting up, you're a sweet kid. I'd kiss you if there wasn't one of them Park men looking.

He didn't move; he was holding on to himself as tight as ever he could.

Come on, she said, we'll have to be going. Ma will think you've been carryin' me off.

I wish I could, he said, with a sort of groan.

Mina didn't reply. She helped him up, and they walked slowly along the paths to the Park gates, saying nothing.

And in the tram they were silent. He and Mina were sitting close together; as you have to in trams; he gently slid his hand across his thigh till it touched hers, just above the knee, he was feeling for her hand. Her fingers came, and locked with his. He sat in a sort of dream, happier at that moment than he had ever been before; it was like a bath of happiness, something limpid and soft, making no demands, call-

ing for no energy; he wanted it to go on for ever.

So he had said, even when he knew it was nonsense, because he knew that he wanted Mina, not only the squeeze of her fingers. Yet before the end of the tram-ride his exaltation had subsided, and he was telling himself that he meant nothing to her, she was amusing herself, she was just being kind. Of course, she wouldn't want him. A blind man. It was absurd. As though she couldn't have her pick amongst hundreds of chaps.

The mood didn't last. She was, he said, as gay as a lark going up De Lorentz Street from the tram, and soon he too was feeling that nothing mattered, why not be gay, go with the times, live with the minutes?

You're a swell kid, he said, imitating Mina, imitating the movies he had never seen, the movie talk he had never heard. Mina went off into a high-pitched laugh. She said he was a caution. All intimacy had gone from her voice. He didn't mind. She was leading him carefully all the same; up the street; on the shady side, at last it was shady. But they were hot before they got to the house. It was still 80 in the shade, she told him, must have been 100 in the middle of the day, easily; she had stopped a moment with him to look at a thermometer on the Fernandez's stoop—old Fernandez had a thermom-

eter outside and inside, she said, and a barometer to tell the weather and a big telescope on a stand, yes, from one end of his stoop it so happened that across, or between, the houses opposite on the lower side of the road, he could see the sea; there were never any ships in that part of the Bay; old Fernandez had been a sailor; he had gold ear-rings in his ears; God's truth.

Well, here we are. Yes, that's the step; and now another. There was no one on the stoop. She took him to his room and left him. He sat on the bed, as he was doing now, and tried to think things out. Well, he had to face up to it. Was he honestly in love with Mina, and she with him? No, Mina wasn't. Did he know what love was, that people talked about? At least, that people talked about, in the few books that had been read to him. He hadn't found that people talked about it much outside books; not the blind men; they and the others talked about women; he knew what they meant; it wasn't love. Well, perhaps this wasn't love, either. And anyhow what did it matter? He came always to that; what did it matter?

Voices sounded in the front passage. A door banged, and there was Mina like a cockatoo screeching out. Hallo, Norah! Hallo, Molly! Come in, you

hell-cats! They all went into the front room; he couldn't hear any more. He didn't know where Ma was, perhaps she was out. He didn't know where Sophie was. He felt suddenly very lonely. Mina had stuck him away in his room and there he was, forgotten. He heard the gramophone. They were trying over some of Norah's records. Why hadn't they asked him? He put his hand in his pocket and took out the mouth-organ, his beloved 'music,' and softly on his music he played to himself the airs of the pieces they were putting on the gramophone in the next room. And when they stopped putting on records he went on playing to himself, playing pieces or just playing out of his head. He forgot about the next room, he forgot about time. With music he could shut himself off, shut himself up in an enchanted palace, the only enchanted palace, he had said, that a blind man could ever know. He was sorry for himself, more sorry than he had ever been before; he could feel the tears in his sightless eyes. Poor Hans, he said, poor Hans, you can't have anything. He meant Mina. She wouldn't want him, she couldn't. He would never have a girl, not Mina, not anyone. He was cut off from life. One might as well be dead. He had never felt like this before, never, never....

He had stopped playing. What a lot of talk there

was going on in the next room. Everybody must be there, and they had forgotten him. He strained his ears to hear the voice of Broido, but Broido, he thought, could not be there.

Then they came and fetched him. Ma came. Come on, Hans, she said, Broido ain't here, but we're beginning the party. He was introduced to Norah and Molly; Norah had a deep voice, almost like a man, if she could sing, he said, it would be like Clara Butt; Molly's voice was like a purr, it wasn't flat, it just went up and down like a cat purring. Tom's bass voice was a bit thicker than in the morning; Hans thought that perhaps Tom had already had one or two. Lucy's talk was a long, long flat sort of complaint; he noticed they didn't pay much attention to her; he thought if they pinched her and made her scream it might wake her up. Mina's voice was as high and sharp as Lucy's was low and flat. Ma said, Them cakes is made to eat. He didn't know if Sophie was there, he couldn't hear her. He found presently that she was, because when Broido and Richards came, someone said, introducing them all to Richards, And there's Sophie, over in that corner. That was how he and Richards and Broido knew that Sophie was in the corner; Sophie said nothing.

They all sat round the room; he tried to figure to

himself how they were sitting, but it wasn't easy; the three of them were put near each other, he and Richards and Broido; he thought Norah was near Broido, and Molly and Mina were the other side of the room; Ma was not far from him and Richards; it was Ma helped them to things; Sophie in some corner, he didn't know which; Lucy vaguely somewhere about, Tom booming away to Mina and Molly. Sweet wine again, and cakes. Just to pass the time. Supper was to be about nine, or a bit before. Someone said soon that it was about eight o'clock, and wasn't it hot? It was a strange sort of party, not like the crowd all talking and shouting, not a bit formal, at the café.

But the party didn't stay so strange and proper, a little stiff; that was only how it began. He supposed people wanted to see what other people would do. And the presence of himself and Broido and Richards must have been very strange to them; the company wouldn't want to do things they couldn't do; romp, for instance; he felt sure that he and the others were rather a drag.

However, music again came along and helped things, in fact it made all the difference. They kept the old gramophone going, and that made people talk. Then they talked so much, all of them, he

could make out nothing. Ma kept stuffing him with cakes. She called Richards Mr. Richards, and stuffed *him* with cakes.

Hans, called out Mina, now you got to play to us.

Well, it seemed to break the ice. Perhaps it helped them to forget, his being able to play, that he was blind; and it fixed Broido and Richards too; people were able to forget the strangeness. There were pauses, while they changed the records, talked about them, asked which he would like, whether he could play this or that; he said he didn't mind, he'd play anything. In the pauses he could hear Ma talking away to Richards, what part of the country did he come from, that sort of thing; and Norah and Broido were talking, joking, free and easy, you'd never think to hear Broido with people that there was anything wrong with him. Molly and Mina just laughed and chaffed, Tom sort of butting in; and Lucy, he found, wasn't very far away from him, she said in her complaining voice how she adored music, but what a pity it was there wasn't any good concerts, only gramophones and wireless and the jazz-bands in the cafés up-town. She liked something Classical. Well, he said, wasn't Handel classical? He'd just played a bit out of Handel, one of the oratorios. Oh, she said, she really meant opera. Oh, said Hans, but Opera

means singing. Yes, she said, and then of course there was Beethoven. Tom can sing, she said.

They got hold of Tom, and he and Tom had a talk, and Tom sang a couple of songs to his mouth-organ accompaniment. There was loud applause. Tom sang, but Hans didn't think there was any music in his voice.

Ma must have gone out, because she came in and said, Come on, you girls, everything's ready. Clear the table, some of you, and put a cloth on. We'll have some supper. Supper in the sitting-room. Well, they couldn't have the party in the kitchen.

Yes, the party, said Hans. There, again, he had never been to a real party before. But soon he found that it was all becoming very confused, he couldn't take things in; it was difficult to separate out the sounds that made up the general noise. Parties seemed to be enormously food; and noise; and presently, indeed very soon, some drinks appeared. There was coffee; everybody had a cup of coffee; but soon there was a noise of bottles being opened, beer-bottles and other bottles. He had a beer. Everybody was saying Good Health. There was a silence, the noise stopped, he could hear everybody drinking at the same time.

He was between Ma and Mina, and Richards was

the other side of Ma, and Broido the other side of Mina, and Norah next to him; that was as far as Hans could make out, he couldn't remember it any clearer than that. Ma looked after Richards. He was glad Mina hadn't given him up to anyone else; she might have; she had to keep the party going.

He didn't know what people were doing. It was a fact, though, that one drink wasn't going to be supposed to be enough. If they all got boozed, what did it matter? To-morrow also was a holiday. He had another beer. It was hot in the sitting-room, and he was thirsty; especially after all those tunes on the mouth-organ; he could drink a lot yet.

Mina said, in her special voice, Gettin' on all right, ducky? She gave his hand a little squeeze. She said, I'll give you some of this trifle; there's nuts on it; Ma and Sophie spent the afternoon skinnin' 'em! Then she called out to Molly, a sort of happy shriek, Come on, have some o' this. It's tipsy-cake. Gawd knows how much Pontac Ma hasn't put into it.

Glass of brandy, too, said Ma.

Mina was busy dishing out helpings of tipsy-cake. He couldn't help thinking of Sophie. Sophie could see, but he wondered if Sophie could make as much out of what she saw as he could out of what he heard. If Sophie was happy, it was a strange dull happiness.

One day he should try to talk to her; he would see if she would talk to him.

Ma's rich, thick syrupy voice was becoming richer and thicker. Man, she said to Richards, you must come again. You poor chaps, I—I wish I 'ad room for more of yer. There, I've put something in your glass; yes, that's it, you've got it: 'ere's 'ow.

Mina was drinking Pontac. She said to him, Don't you have Pontac, baby, after beer; you can have a brandy.

Hans wondered how much more there was, how many other things. Lucy was drinking sherry, so was Norah. There was a lot of laughing going on. Tom, it seemed, took his coat off, though Lucy told him not to.

Oh, go on, said Ma; you kin all take your coats off. Better for yer. Which we pore women can't do. And she laughed and laughed.

Got no coats to take off, said Tom Barnet, stupidly.

Broido said in his sharp metallic voice, Well, there ain't no law against taking things off—except the spoons.

They all laughed. Hans thought they were getting a bit silly; his head was as clear as a bell; perhaps he only thought them silly because he couldn't help

feeling a bit out of it. Richards wasn't saying anything. He was quite sure Ma was getting boozed; perhaps Richards was, too. How would Richards get home? Broido, as far as he knew, had never been drunk in his life.

Anyway, they all took their coats off; Hans never got his back till next morning. Next morning! And the night between! Mina! His thoughts were leaping ahead; he pulled them back; he wanted to see it from the very beginning, from the opening of the door. And the door couldn't open as he hadn't gone to bed; the party wasn't over. But it was nearly over. God, he said, it was hellish hot. Mina kept saying, Shut up, Bro. He heard Broido muttering, Oh, hell. Then it seemed to him that Broido and Norah were having a long whispering talk but he couldn't be sure; people weren't sitting still, they were all moving about, and someone, perhaps Molly because Mina hadn't yet moved from his side, someone started the gramophone again. Mina moved away.

She said, No, I don't see we can dance.

Tom said, No, there ain't much room.

He knew they wanted to dance, their voices told him that. Of course it was because of them they couldn't; the three poor 'Bloody Blind Men.' Broido kept saying, Oh, hell, in a low voice. Hans could

hear the fierce temper in his voice. Norah said, Can't you be quiet?

Lucy came and sat by him. She said, It must be awful being blind. But then everything's awful; you don't know; you're spared a lot. You think we're all happy, I suppose, because we can see; but we're not. Tom, that's my husband, keeps on wanting me to have a kid, but I won't. I've seen what it's like: I'd die of fear. He says he can make me. Can he? But you don't know. I'd sooner drop off the pier. When I married him I thought he wouldn't mind; he said I could please myself, he was that mad to have me. Life ain't a garden party. Her tired complaining voice went on and on, telling him things he didn't know women talked about at all.

The gramophone had stopped. Suddenly he heard immediately behind him, what seemed to him a terrific noise. It was Ma, beginning to snore; they all laughed: she went on snoring. Molly and Norah said they must go home. We shall be all right, they said with a sort of giggle. Tom was singing in a drunken voice, perhaps he was putting it on, We won't go home till morning. Lucy said to Hans, you see that's what I have to put up with. He thought it rotten of her to talk of her husband like that. He wondered if it was the sherry made her breath smell so.

Then Ma waked up, and they all went. Ma didn't seem blotto at all; her nap had done that; she said, What about a night-cap? So they had, he supposed, a night-cap, most of them. Not Richards. Poor old Richards was sound asleep. They told Hans Richards was on the sofa, and would have to stay there. Broido went home alone. For some reason Norah and Molly didn't offer to help him, or if they did Broido refused. He was like that. Take care of yourself, he said to Hans. Good night all. He would come round to-morrow. Gradually they all went. Hans felt that it was time. They had been happy, jolly, noisy; a gay party; but it seemed to him to have gone stale, like the air in the room.

At last they were gone. Richards was snoring gently on the sofa. Of course he was blotto. They threw a blanket over him. Mina came in and said Sophie was sick, she always got sick at a party, even if she didn't have much. Come on, Ma, she said, bedtime.

She took Hans to his room. He sat on his bed as usual and began to take off his shoes. Well, she said, did you like the party?

He nodded, saying he had liked the Park better.

Mina said nothing. She was standing in front of him. He imagined she was looking at him.

It was a lousy party, she said. G'night.

She went away, closing the door. She had forgotten to kiss him. Or didn't want to. But there was something in her voice he didn't understand.

He was in bed, lying flat on his back on the bed with his arms stretched out; how hot it was, a real hot summer's night, not a breath of air; he didn't feel like sleep. What did he feel like? He was conscious of a force, a weight, keeping him down; so strong, yet his strength nothing. He felt, he said, as a tortoise must feel when you pick it up and hold it in the air, its head and four short legs with clawed toes moving aimlessly, uselessly, its body fixed firmly in its shell, and you holding the shell. He remembered tortoises; he had not been cruel, he had never hurt one; when he put them down off they went, in a hurry; even tortoises have eyes.

He heard the door open; and then shut. He lay perfectly still. What was it?

Mina's voice said very softly, Are you awake?

Yes, he whispered.

She came, and sat on his bed. I couldn't get off, she said. I thought I'd come. Ain't it hot.

Yes, he breathed. This was Mina, yet somebody else. Why had she come? He daren't think. It would be too bitter.

They're all asleep, she said; only you and me awake.

What did she mean? Her voice was soft as silk, the sound of it was a thrill. Was the room pitch dark, as they said? He hoped so. He wondered if she could see him. Well, what if she did? He could lie naked if he liked.

But he made no movement. He dare not try to touch her. Mina! was all he said. Then, Hans, she said, I had to come. She dropped her voice to a tiny whisper. I had to come. It wasn't I couldn't sleep. I wanted you.

Mina, he said again.

She took one of his hands and carried it to her breast. She too was naked. He gave a little cry....

Gripping the edge of the pallet with his hands, he stiffened his back. God! he had never held Stephanie in his arms like that. From that night he had begun to grow up; Mina had taught him; taught him the needs of women as well as men. She knocked over all his little bundle of ideas about things called morals. She said, you've got to live. She laughed about Broido, saying he was all right, one didn't mind his toughness, but she wouldn't ever stand being ordered about. Mina! Mina! said Hans now, you know it was the other way round. For in time he had learnt that

Broido, as was his way, was the one to tire of Mina, not she of him.

But nothing could take from him the meaning of the new life that leapt in him when Mina came and made him, for all his blindness, her lover. She stroked his limbs, called him sweet names and told him how good-looking he was; and how strong; and not a fool. She was sometimes so careless that he wondered whether Ma and Sophie knew. She told him it didn't matter; why should it matter? Soon there wasn't anything he didn't know. Even to knowing at the end that it wasn't really love, it wasn't even sentiment, it was only desire. An instinct. Does it matter what you call it? said Mina.

CHAPTER IV

SOMEONE is turning the key in the lock. Locks are terrible, all locks are terrible. They were coming to take him to court. The door is opening. The sweat is standing out on my head. Is it the warder? Listen! The warder says they will be coming to fetch him in half an hour; is there anything he wants? God, can't they leave me alone? He knows what the warder means. No, he is all right. The warder can go away. But the man comes in; oh, yes, he will take the breakfast things, the mug, the plate. He has heavy boots on now. He says nothing. Again the door closes, and the key makes its turning noise and then the snap of the lock.

Why can't he be left alone? He doesn't want to go to court. Is it fear? Well, if it is, what then? He will have to go. No, he says, it isn't fear; it's all wrong; I haven't done anything. It seemed to him that they would be all against him. It seemed to him that Mr. Pons would be against him, the man they told him would defend him in court; he had only had Mr.

Pons come to him yesterday and Mr. Pons, with his grave, cold voice, had asked him a lot of strange questions, and had then gone away saying he would do his best for him. They had talked of Stephanie; Mr. Pons said perhaps they wouldn't have to bring her in, not her name. No, she wouldn't be there, unless the Judge said she must be. Mr. Pons asked a lot of questions about Stephanie and Broido, but it came to him that Mr. Pons knew much more about it than he did himself. That made him think that after all and deep down, Mr. Pons would be against him; even Mr. Pons wouldn't be able to understand that he had to stop Broido.

Well, there was half an hour. He wiped his face with his handkerchief. They might all be dead in half an hour. They might all be dead and standing in front of God; because there was a God; and perhaps he would see God, and Broido, too. He would hold out his hand to Broido; Broido would understand that they were quits. God would understand.

He would understand everything, even about Mina and him and their sleeping together, and then not. She had taught him, she said, all there was to know. But how had she known so much? Oh, in the usual way. Somebody had taught her, and others had taught her more. It was all going on, he found, this

learning and teaching, and sometimes only two poor boobs together finding out; all going on under the surface, but only just under the surface. What they called morals, he thought, must be having a tough time. Yet he couldn't definitely say that morals was bunk. He seemed to be in two halves, one of which was persuaded that happiness, bliss, could not be wrong; as long as it hurt nobody; and the other thinking that rules and laws must have a reason.

He said so to Mina. She said, Oh hell, you got a bee in your bonnet. Isn't this enough for you? she said, kissing him, caressing him. That was all she cared about; she called it love; the play of their bodies. She never gave it a thought; you didn't have to think, but you had to live; that was all there was to it.

She was very gentle with him. Always he felt that. He was still a boy to her, a blind boy, someone to be petted and dealt gently with, not as she might deal with a man. He wondered how she would deal with a man. As though he, too, wasn't a man! In every way this curse that was on him pushed him down. It was wonderful with Mina, how natural she was and he so natural with her, in the dark together and she seeing, he said, sometimes no more than he did, but she wasn't his, not his alone; she had had, and would

have, other men; he came in between, she found a use for him. It was a bone thrown to a dog. That was how he sometimes thought of it. Yet when she didn't come he would lie and wait for her in a sort of anguish. And if that night she didn't come at all, unless there was a reason for her not coming, and of course, consistently there was, times that they took carefully in their calculations, he tossed about aching for her, sure that he was desperately in love.

But when it became evident that what he perhaps called love she, as she often declared, had no time for—all sloshy, she used to say, like on the films, and then babies and a couple of rooms and yer husband coming home drunk—he, too, found a new view. Which was well enough, only what would happen when she got tired of him? As of course she would. He began to see that he was too easy for her, always on tap; he had no chance of any initiative; it lay naturally with her. It had to. But he wondered, if it hadn't been Mina, if it had been some other girl, more like what he thought girls were, what then would he have done, how would he have come off. He was sure they were not all like Mina. Yet, whenever he had thought that, it had seemed to him to be unfair. Who was he? Didn't he owe her everything? He wouldn't allow anyone to say a word

against her, no, not even when she chucked him up. That was not for a long time. Every night, almost, she came; how Ma and Sophie took it he didn't know; they were not supposed to know, but how could they bloody well not know?

Ma leaned over him more and more, especially at breakfast, after Mina had left for the factory, she called him sonny-boy, her voice was like a whole sweetshop or like the smell in the kitchen making toffee or fudge, it seemed an excuse for resting on him somewhere her warm fat hand. And she had taken to kissing him good night. You're a pretty boy, she used to say; her voice had undertones he didn't understand, didn't want to put meanings to. Not with Ma.

So it went on, his life at De Lorentz Street, for months and months; he could remember it, like a string of events, a continual record of sounds like a long, long piece of music; or all jumbled up, in a flash. He could put it on, like a record on a gramophone; he had no other occupation. Not since he had come to prison. Like a piece of music, that was not sound only, nor was it pictures; there were no pictures in his mind or very vague ones, not rightly to be called pictures, things which you see; but words, sounds, tastes, the smell of things; and more

than that, feelings; just as music was made up not of sounds only but of feelings also. Yet, he said, his life was not music, it was different. He didn't try to take it any further, the comparison. No music could be so involved as his life had become from the day he left the Becks to that night in the winter when he had gone to the Pompadour Café to say that Broido had fallen down the stairs. And involved since, for he could not resolve in his mind whether Broido was really his friend, whether Stephanie——

He wondered whether Stephanie would be in the court, though Mr. Pons had said she would not; perhaps she'd be there all the same, with the crowd, come to see him; to see him, not to be in the case, and he wouldn't know if she was there. What would he know? It wasn't any good, thinking about it, building up things to say; it would have to come, if they wanted to know, only out of what he remembered.

He would have to say that Mina had taken him one night to the Pompadour Café, and that there he had met Stephanie. He had only heard her voice. Her voice had gone straight to his heart. His heart was ready; perhaps Mina had done that. Would he have to tell them? went round and round in his head; to look forward was to be inextricably confused, though

his life should depend on it; confusion it was, a blank, a blank wall over which his hands would go feeling nervously for an opening, a way through, some little gate; and there was nothing.

There was that awful night in the Winter, he said, round which everything would revolve, the judge and the jury and Mr. Pons, yet it was past, it didn't exist any more; now it was Spring, it must be Spring. For the first time in his life he was knowing nothing of the approach of Spring, the feel of the air, the growing warmth, the smell of the Spring in the fresh things at the greengrocers' after the stale smell of Winter. Would it come to him as he went from prison to the court? The Spring, and Stephanie—no, he would never believe that Stephanie was not like the Spring, fresh, unsoiled. Not like Mina. Well, then, was Mina worse than Stephanie? Because with her body she had made him happy? He didn't know. There must be a reason for the laws men made, for the feelings they had.

One night Mina didn't come; then another night she didn't come; he knew she could have. She sat by him in the morning, helped him to his breakfast till she rushed out; she talked as she had always talked, gay, bright, high-pitched, shrieking at me, he said, shrieking at Sophie, cursing and swearing at a ladder

in her stocking yet laughing at the same time. She was the same Mina, nothing had happened, yet at night she didn't come.

It was days before he got a chance to ask her. She didn't avoid him. There were always people in and out. Ma and Sophie, Broido, sometimes old Richards to whom Ma seemed to have taken a fancy. Broido brought him along, cursing at having to drag about the slow old Richards, but good-humouredly so that it took the sting out.

He was sitting in his room one evening, waiting for Broido to come for him, they were going out for a walk, perhaps to the café. Mina came in. No one else was there. He felt that she came in and looked at him, saying nothing.

Mina, he said.

Well, Hans?

Why have you stopped coming? he said, his voice trembling a little. It wasn't as it used to be, something had gone out of their joy. But he wanted her still.

Oh, I don't know, she said. But he knew that she did, he heard it in her voice.

Aren't you coming any more? he said.

I don't know, she said again. I might...or I mightn't.

Come to-night, he said. He was begging her to come. Strong emotion made even only the two words difficult to say.

You want too much, she said, but she came and stood near him. His hand touched her leg, he let his hand caress the long, smooth line of her leg up over her calf, behind the knee, to where the flesh of her thigh began above her stocking. Don't do that, she said, and in her voice there was a note of tribulation. Why not? he said. It was nothing new. For a moment he thought she was going to cry. This was another Mina. What is it? he said.

You'll hate me, she said. I don't care. I can't help it. You're a dear. You've taught me things too. Everything came rushing out, the little sharp sentences came racing out pell-mell.

But it couldn't last, Hans. It—it wasn't love.

No, he said slowly, it wasn't love.

She was sitting beside him on the bed. He found her hand and held it. No, it wasn't love—for her. But for him? He was horribly unhappy. No, of course it wasn't love, but he then had nothing else.

There's a boy, she said in quick almost breathless words, and he's fond of me, and—and it's different. No, I've never been with him—Hans knew what she

meant, it was strange how modest she had become, strange how she avoided putting the point-blank words to things as always before with him she had done, shocking him at first, that a girl should use all the words.

Well, that was all there was to it, he said, scratching his head; he had filled the gap, he supposed, but the phrase, the thought was no longer bitter. He was to fill another gap, but how different! There was no end to the events that had flowed from Broido taking him to De Lorentz Street. Mina had taken him up, and then dropped him; without hypocrisy, without pretence. She was there in the mornings—he took care never to be late, never to run the risk of losing the few minutes that he could feel her there beside him, putting milk on his porridge, some sugar—but in the evenings she was scarcely ever at home. She came back very, very late, sometimes, he was sure, not till the early hours of the morning; he would be awake, or he would wake up; the slightest sound was enough. He heard everything that went on in the house at night, the walls were so thin, Ma snoring, Sophie grunting as she turned over, and the sound of the mattress; he could even hear, he said, Mina undressing. But it was Ma now took him to his room, though she had no need to; she kissed him good night

—he was sure you could hear the kiss out in the street; when Ma had left him Sophie would sometimes open the door, without knocking, and say G'night, abruptly, and shut the door. He never knew whether Sophie mightn't do this when he was taking off his shirt or his trousers. Well, he couldn't help it; and anyway he had no light in the room.

Nothing seems to last, yet everything goes on. Surprisingly. Every day the walk between De Lorentz Street and the workshop. Every day the workshop. The shrill voice of the superintendent. Miss Gray reading to them four afternoons in the week. A new crime now, and a woman poisoner; poisoning several people, first one man who lived with her and then another; poison; they had no chance; slow calculated poisoning; and found out at last, after months and months, though at first there had been no suspicion. Then home again to De Lorentz Street. All unchanged as from the first day. So it seemed. Yet how utterly different. He wasn't the same man, for one thing; Mina was another person; Broido was the same, yet he didn't know if Broido mightn't also be different, he was more morose, didn't joke so much, his jokes were more bitter, they seemed made to hurt, they seemed also to hurt Broido himself. Broido was like the blind Samson, in the Bible, hurling bitter

words against the Philistines, against the world. Why was this?

Oh, he knew, he knew, but the knowledge was a torture; because he didn't know enough; his whole heart had been filled, that fatal night, with the most horrible suspicions. For how long had Broido and Stephanie been friends? Was it before his meeting with Stephanie, or not till after? There was no way in which he could find out. Madness to try, yet maddening not to know. Broido was dead, but Stephanie was there, somewhere in the town, getting up every day, going to work, talking, laughing, going to cafés with fellows, going to the pictures, oh, alive, alive!

Everybody was alive, except Broido, except himself. This wasn't being alive, this torture of silence, of solitude. Mina had hurt him, but he had made the best of it; he knew that it couldn't go on, he was only half a man, someone who couldn't take her out, who couldn't share; a person always at home who could only share one thing. It didn't seem to him a bit strange when the dull-witted Sophie also wanted to share; it wasn't a human want as with him and Mina; it was an animal instinct. She was made the same way as all the rest; how could she have different instincts, even if her mind was different? Everybody had instincts; what was the good of pretending? But when

the heavy lumpish Sophie pushed her way in, made her demands on him——

Poor kid, he said, he hadn't wanted her. But what could he do? God, he supposed it would be Ma next! The house in De Lorentz Street was being put to funny uses; they would have the police in; sort of white slave traffic upside down. No, he didn't mean that. As long as Ma kept out of it. It was all right about him and the girls; he was glad they liked him, glad he could pay them back; but he was always a bit nervous about Ma. He figured her as something big and round and enormously soft, and her mouth—he felt that if she got hold of him he would have no chance. Well, it hadn't happened, that was all. He was ashamed that he should have had such thoughts. For what had she not done for him? Taken him in, treated him with consistent kindness, a bountifulness that nothing could ever make him forget. No, Ma was all right. He could hear the rich roundness of her voice like some of the big sweet tones of the organ, of the Wurlitzer recital they had taken him to hear. But Sophie——

He was distressed. The days, since Mina had stopped coming, were not as they had been. So it was, he said, that out of happiness he had discovered unhappiness; for he had never been unhappy before.

No, not ever, not actively; sometimes a dull sense of want, but it had not lasted; he was patient, contented. Casting his mind over all those in the blind workshop, there were dozens of them there, it seemed to him that they were all, in their way, patient, contented; except perhaps Broido. And Broido wasn't utterly a blind man. Broido wanted things, he wanted an active life, to be the centre of things; he was almost blind, so it was not possible, yet not so impossible as for the totally blind who had therefore to be resigned, content, patient; not quite impossible, for had not doctor said to Broido that there was no knowing but that, even if it should be as by some miracle, he might recover his sight? Doctor held out no such faint hope to Hans. Yet Broido had gone on getting worse, slowly.

For himself, said Hans, he had had no hope, and so should have been resigned. Well, he was. It wasn't now the being blind that distressed him, not exactly that, but the sense of loss for one thing, and the sense of frustration of life for another that came to him; and stayed with him when Mina deserted him, as easily as she had slipped that first night into his room, deserting him now for another.

He supposed therefore that he was in the mood not to care a damn, otherwise he knew, he knew in-

deed all the time, that there was a something about Mina's sister that would put him off. Yet who was he to be put off? Were they not two cripples together, he crippled in his eyes, she in her mind? Well, then.

He hadn't cared a damn. He was in bed, Ma was already snoring, Mina was out. His door opened, he heard the sound of bare feet, not lightly treading but shuffling on the floor-boards—he knew of course that it was Sophie—and then the door closing. Sophie was in the room.

Hans, she said in her dull flat voice, but underneath it seemed to him that there was some other sound trying to come through. She was crying, it was a sort of sniffle.

He sat up in bed, and feeling in the air with his hands he found her near him, he had indeed heard the approach of her bare feet from the door to the bed.

What is it, Sophie? he said.

Breathing heavily, she said, Want Hans.

He had hold of her arm, there was no tenseness, no resistance in her; he made her sit on the side of the bed. What was he to say to her? She had on a nightgown, he could feel the thick coarse cotton material clothing her inert flesh; this was not Mina, quick,

lithe, intense in a thin garment that seemed almost to be part of her.

Want Hans, she said again, stolidly.

He could feel the struggle under the voice to express things; he thought of someone tied, bound hand and foot, and gagged, in a chair in an empty house, trying to call out, trying to call for help. And only a mumble coming.

She sat and waited. Then, Hans very nice, she said. Mina not here. Sophie here. But she didn't move. She sat on his bed in her thick nightgown, not moving. Her voice was like a sound breaking through from dumbness. She was not trembling, there was no sign of excitement, but there was a smell of perspiration.

Not knowing what to do or say he put his hand on her shoulder; he was thinking, it seemed to him that he was thinking deeply, and of many things at once; as it were without directing it, he let his hand pass over her, outlining her body, stroking the unshapely body, patiently waiting, under the thick cotton. It was a caress, to her. He found that she was sweating profusely.

Another habit was formed. She did not come as often as Mina had done. Like an animal, it seemed, she was satisfied. When once it had begun he didn't

mind; it was something; she never stayed all night. Mina, he thought, didn't know. Well, he didn't care a damn.

Until one day he thought, Oh, hell, if she should have a kid. She didn't do what Mina did. He tried to tell her, but she didn't understand. So they went on. But he was not happy. If only he wasn't blind he could see things; he knew that actually it was so easy. If he could only tell Mina about it.

But nothing had happened. The days went by. They were bringing him nearer and nearer to this, to the prison, but he had no inkling that out of a life so simple as his, so almost empty of everything, tragedy could come. The only feeling he had was that it would go on and on, each day was to be lived patiently through, and there would always be Broido for his friend and perhaps some time some other girl would be kind to him.

Then, so simply, so unrecognisably do things begin, one day, one evening, suddenly Mina said, Come on. Let's go to the café. Aren't you going out with Bernardus? said Ma. Mina, he noticed, didn't answer her—not in words; he didn't know what looks they might have exchanged. Come on, Hans, said Mina; get your hat. His heart gave a little jump; it was so long since she had taken him out, anywhere,

that he had not imagined she was meaning him—she might as easily have meant Ma. He and Sophie had often of late been left in the house together. But the jump his heart made wasn't important. He was sure it didn't mean she was coming back to him; he wasn't sure that he wanted her; he guessed that perhaps she wanted for some reason to annoy Bernardus —Hans had never seen him, he had, it seemed, never been to the house—or perhaps Bernardus was away or working overtime, Hans didn't then know what was his job, or perhaps she was just being kind. For of course she did know how to be kind; that was Mina, rough and ready in many things, but to him never unkind, indeed unfailingly kind, only of course, impulsive. She couldn't be different. He wondered, down in his mind, whether she had yet been with Bernardus; how long, he said, would she be able not to. Didn't he know Mina? Hadn't she told him everything? She would, he knew, have to be met, have to be satisfied. He used to wonder whether all women didn't have to be satisfied. But not Stephanie——

He felt someone putting his hat on his head. It was Mina, she had flown off to his room and got it. Here's your stick, she said, putting it in his hand.

And going along she was as gay as a lark, he didn't

know what a lark was except that it was a bird, how strange that one should use words like that, of course, the word came to him from the words of a song, he could play the music of it easily, he could, but he did not, though the mouth-organ was in his pocket. Indeed, his music had been neglected for weeks and weeks; Mina hadn't asked him to play, Ma he supposed forgot; even when alone in his room he had stopped playing, or only sometimes, softly, in an undertone; like humming, not proper playing, because he would so often be thinking of something else.

Mind yer step, she said, we're crossin' the road. You and me mustn't be run over.

He heard the cars rushing past on the asphalt, the swirl of the air as the big buses sailed past, the rattle of the trams. It was now March, the days would be shortening; she told him that all the lights were on in the street, in the shops; it was after supper, of course, about eight o'clock, but it was Friday night. He could hear and sense the crowd; everybody busy shopping, he supposed, for the week-end. Friday night was pay-night. There was a sustained deep buzz round all the bars and pubs, like an angry beehive, a raucous buzz.

He knew when they were at the café, without Mina

telling him; the Pompadour had its own peculiar smell, sweetish and a bit closed up like all the others, yet in it something different. In fact they all had their differences. He couldn't analyse it further. There was a smell of face-powder also from the Pompadour.

It was a noisy night, dozens of people talking, men and women, the rattle of cups and saucers, spoons; glasses touching one another as they were picked up or put down; the punch and tinkle of the cash-register; the wireless playing jazz, jazz tunes from the gramophone, records either at the café or at the broadcasting studio coming full blast over the wireless. How familiar it was. Life, he said again; and, submerged in the noise, mixed up with half a hundred people, he could feel himself one of them, a part of it, not a poor bloody blind man (Broido, that was) set on one side, pushed out of the clash and the rush and the swift living. The café was the world.

As they stood for a moment inside the door-way, Mina evidently looking round for a place, he thought that perhaps there wouldn't be a place, no seats vacant anywhere at any of the tables, and they would have to go away again. Was it possible to have a worse feeling of disappointment?

Then with a gasp and under her breath, Mina said —she was holding his hand and he felt her fingers stiffen on his—she said, Christ! there's Bernardus and that girl. What girl? he said. Stephanie, she said. The name meant nothing to him.

They found a table and sat down. Mina still held his hand, she didn't seem to know what she was doing. He felt, behind his blind eyes, that people were looking at them. He didn't mind, he had experienced it before; he knew that soon they would stop, they would look at something else. It was clear that Mina was on the raw. She hadn't expected to find Bernardus in the café; he didn't know anything about the girl. A fellow did sometimes have to take a girl out; it didn't necessarily mean anything. Perhaps Bernardus was throwing over Mina because she was so—standoffish. Well, it might be so. The jazz band was playing one of the Blues; he liked all the Blues. Mina said they would have ices. A girl called Rosy brought Broido in; at least they came in together. Broido always pretended to outsiders that he could see quite well. Mina told him that Rosy was coming in with Broido. He knew all about Rosy; she wasn't important; Broido had told him.

Are they coming to us? he said, for he felt that he would like to have old Broido there, now that Mina

was suddenly different, not wanting him, because her mind was set on Bernardus.

They all said Good evening. Rosy said she could only stay a couple of minutes. She had been eating onions, but he thought her voice sounded friendly. Broido said she was a nice girl, like a sister; she was always wanting to help people. Her job was in a sweet factory, wrapping sweets; had to do it so fast, she said, you hadn't time to eat any, even if you wanted to.

Mina said nothing. She was sitting quite close to him on the plush-cushioned bench, the others sat on chairs, and he could tell by a hundred little signs, all imperceptible to sight but clear to him, not only that she was distressed, worried, but also that she was angry. She was in a rage. Poor Mina. Didn't that show that she wanted Bernardus more perhaps than he wanted her? Nothing lasted. He was sorry for Mina. Perhaps she would give way, and cry and howl when she got home.

Well, she didn't. It turned out that it was all a mistake. This girl that he was with was nothing to Bernardus; she was his cousin; his auntie had said, Go on; you might take Steph out sometimes. This was the first time.

Mina said, I didn't know your train was down.

No, said Bernardus, it wasn't. Bernardus was a steward in the dining saloon on the train; his saloon was called the Baviaan, they all had names; he went up and down the line in the saloon, a thousand miles it was. No, the Baviaan wasn't due down until to-morrow, he said; they were now all sitting at the same table, Rosy had gone; the other girl, Bernardus's cousin, hadn't said a word; but, said Bernardus, he had been sent down the line, detached on the up journey to come down on some matter of stores, another man had taken his place.

A fine life, Hans thought, always moving about, travelling about the country in trains, seeing the cities each end, seeing the towns you went through, seeing the land, the land, yes, and the farms, the farms....

Bernardus had a nice manly voice. He could understand what a man like that would mean to Mina Roos; he would steady her; all the laws and rules would come in again; to get Bernardus she would change, she had already changed, all the wantonness was gone; he could read it as in a book, better than in a book because had he eyes he would not know, until he learnt, how to read, but his senses told him that she had become so.

In a little pause in the talk of Bernardus and Mina,

with Broido chipping in here and there, and in a pause also of the crowd noise and of the ever all-pervading music, he heard the girl beside him, on the other side of him from Mina, he heard her say a little sentence in a clear, sweet yet ringing voice that went through him, through every nerve and vein in a manner that no words could describe. He had never heard a voice like it, nor any other sound; it was in a sense purer than music, it was, he said, a sort of celestial music. Yet she was human; she was just a girl; she had a laugh like an angel. If you were nearly dead and you heard her laugh, you would come back to life again if only to go on hearing it. He could hear now ringing in his head the silvery tones; yet not silvery, they were golden; and not golden either, nor any metal, not even the most precious; her voice was a thing by itself, there was nothing in all his experience with which it could be compared.

He had never been able to remember that little sentence—a little sentence, she was smiling, he thought, and then a laugh—for to him it had been pure sound, not a thing of words.

The talk went on. It came out that Mina knew Stephanie and Bernardus, but she did not know they were cousins, nor even that they knew one another. They talked about that for a long time. Mina said

Stephanie must come up and see them; Hans wondered whether that wasn't her way of trying to get Bernardus also to come up, for so far he had never been to De Lorentz Street.

Come on, said Broido, we better have another coffee or something. He shouted to Magdalena.

Magdalena shouted back, Oh, hell, can't you see I'm coming? Of course, Broido couldn't see. But Magdalena was like that. She didn't mean any harm. Hans thought Magdalena liked shouting, because she could shout louder than any row. He heard then the voice of the Greek—the man must have come over from his place by the cash-register and the cigarettes and sweets—saying: What you like? Coffee? Ices? How many? There was no sound so cold, so implacable, as the Greek's voice, like the ice on the dam in Winter, on the farm where he had held jagged three-cornered pieces of ice in his hands and had tasted it with his tongue.

They had coffees. Mina said to Stephanie: Put some sugar in for Hans; he likes three; he don't like it too sweet.

It made a beginning; it put him and Stephanie at once on a footing. She began to talk to him, asking him what he did.

That was why he wondered whether Stephanie

and Broido had ever met before; because if they had he would have thought it was a thing she might have known, his being at the workshop, surely Broido would have told her. But perhaps, though Hans was his friend, Broido never talked about him to anybody else? You couldn't know, with Broido, what he would do.

So he told her about the workshop and how he had been taught to cane chairs and make baskets; he said that he and Broido always sat together and mostly Broido fetched him in the morning and took him home in the evening—yes, he lived at De Lorentz Street, with Mina and Ma Roos—because Broido could see just a little, and he couldn't see at all, he could only tell, as it were, the difference between the day and the night. But it didn't matter much, he said, because people were good and kind, people did look after them, it was a marvel.

Never before had he said so much to anybody, he felt he could go on talking to Stephanie all night, telling her about himself, relating the story of his life. Something in him made him want to do it.

Stephanie said: But not to be able to see? It seems a terrible thing.

In the beautiful voice there was a funny little crack; he felt that there were tears at the back of it,

because she was sorry for him; it was the sweetest thing that had ever happened to him.

Well, he said, it wasn't so terrible when you got used to it. They were having this talk to themselves; Mina and Bernardus were having their talk; Broido, he found, had moved away to another table, he didn't know why. Broido had a strong penetrating voice, and the sound of it came to him from somewhere else in the room. His quick ear caught stray words from voices all over the café, punctuated by the shouts of Magdalena; and over it all the loud blare of the jazz-band; yet between him and Stephanie, amidst all the noise, there was, he said, an outspan of peace and quietness where they could talk, in low tones, undisturbed, where, enhanced by the background of terrific though simple noise, her voice came to his ears in such a way as to make his very being thrill and his heart beat faster.

She was close to him, on the cushioned seat, so close that her body was touching his, but he felt no physical thrill, the thrill was in her voice, the sound of it and the attitude of it to him; it seemed she felt she must get as near to him as she could, to make him understand, because he was blind; she was turned towards him, her face was near to his, he knew she was looking at him all the time. He wanted to know

just how she was sitting; putting out his hand, feeling gently in the air, he let his fingers touch her as his eyes would have done for him; he touched her knee, her hip, they were jammed up against his, he touched her waist, her elbow, her shoulder, then her face which he found was resting on her hand, and her elbow was resting on the table. That was how he taught himself the beginnings of what he knew about Stephanie.

Well, she said, laughing at what he had done: Will you know me now?

Yes, he said, I shall know you.

CHAPTER V

WITH a sigh, shifting on the pallet bed, he said, Yes, that was how he got to know her; that was the beginning; there had never been an end. The end was that he knew nothing, and nobody could tell him. Broido was dead. Stephanie would never tell. Was it possible that all the time, and even with that voice, she was a no-good? Broido had said so. What had Broido not said? Hell! what did it matter? What did it matter now?

But if he had known, known that she was that, well, he too could have had her, not only her voice and her love—for it did seem to him that he had her love—but her body also. And he knew it was worth having. He would then have had everything; and Broido would still be alive. Yet, no, he said, not everything, for the faith that he had in Stephanie would have been destroyed. Well, it was destroyed now. Or was it, in spite of them all, in spite of Broido, not destroyed?

That was the thing that ought to be enquired into,

not this unimportant matter as to whether he had killed Broido or not; unimportant, because he had not meant to kill him, not to *kill* him, but only to stop him saying that Stephanie was a whore.

Because she was not, she was not, not, not, didn't he know, hadn't he the evidence of all his senses but his eyes that she was a pure flame, a bit of gold, something no one could ever spoil?

Yet Broido had said it. Why would he lie? Broido had never lied to him before; in his hard metallic voice he would say that he didn't hold with lies, only a bloody coward told lies. No one could call Broido a coward, not in any way.

If only he could know the truth. He felt that he would pay any penalty they asked, if he could be sure of knowing the real truth. And his mind, humming with the word truth, went back, like the shuttle it was, to that evening when Mina took him to the café, and afterwards they all went home to De Lorentz Street together; Mina and Bernardus by themselves, and he and Broido with Stephanie between them, coming next. Yes, he said, even there at the beginning, Stephanie, this girl, was between Broido and him. Who could know what was to come of it? For he had been happy, absurdly happy; they had all been happy; he could hear now the laughs echoing in the

empty street when they had turned up out of the main street with its noisy traffic. Broido was as he liked him to be, gay, funny, without bitterness in his jokes; he wondered if Stephanie minded when Broido got a bit near the bone; such a thought had never occurred to him with Mina. He noticed that she didn't laugh so very loudly when Broido told the story about the cat and the earth-closet, and when the old woman went there—well, it was a farm story, and farm stories seem to do better on farms, out in the open, not in the narrow streets. But when Broido told his funny stories about people, she went into fits.

At home, of course, Ma bustled about, they have to have a glass of wine, she said how Bernardus had a fine job and wouldn't his wife, when he married, have a time of it wondering, when he went away, just when he would be coming back—so she could be ready for him, said Ma, laughing richly. Now, Ma, said Mina in a sharp voice, don't be silly. Bernardus said, Ha! Ha! you don't know what goes on on the trains. And Ma said, laughing still, and of course you ain't goin' to tell us. That was the way they kept it up. Mina said nothing. Yet he had heard her lots of times say the most awful things, spicy wasn't the word, just by the way of a joke. Now she seemed to disapprove. Funny, wasn't it? And he found himself

disapproving because of Stephanie. Stephanie didn't say much, but she had the loveliest little giggle, full of fun it was, but kept down, half as though she thought she oughtn't to laugh; but she couldn't help it. No more, he said, than he could help building up for himself an image, or whatever it was, in his mind of this girl to whom he had become immediately attached. He wondered all that evening what she was like, if she was pretty, if she was well formed, what sort of hair, was it curls or soft and smooth to the touch; he knew only that she had a rounded arm, a firm hand, a voice——

Nor had he ever known very much more. How then was he to say that for this girl, with only a voice, he had killed his friend? Yet he had. No one was going to be allowed to tell lies about her. He had kept on repeating that to Mr. Pons. It seemed to him that Mr. Pons had a weary voice, though his questions were to the point. He noticed that Mr. Pons couldn't help saying, But why kill him? It seemed that Mr. Pons didn't think it was a very good reason. But then he hadn't killed Broido, he hadn't known....

The key again was being pushed into the lock, it was being turned; there were men outside, warders, policemen, they were coming to take him to his trial.

God! he said, a sudden horror seizing him, they shan't take me, I won't go. Feeling with his hands he clutched the pallet bed, he clutched and hung on, they shouldn't take him, it was his defence. He felt that the emergency would almost force him to see, that sight would burst through the staring eyeballs so that he could defend himself against the policemen.

But it did not. The men were now in the cell. Still holding on to the pallet bed, as for dear life, he thought, No, no, I won't go; they can't make me.

The warder said, It's all right, Segal; no one's going to hurt you.

And another man said, Can't you make it easy for us?

And still another man said, We can't keep the judge waiting, you know.

The judge!...

But it was only a ruse, though the man had a soft pleasant voice. The judge was a long time coming. For him it was only changing one cell for another. The warder didn't come, the other men took him; they said the case would last all day; and to-morrow; so there were no other prisoners taken to the Courthouse with him. He was alone in the prison van, with the two men, driving through the streets from the gaol to the Courthouse, and it was a Spring day. He

had felt the Spring on his face, the warm sun, the richness of the air; there was a breeze blowing off the sea. He noticed all these things, for suddenly he had become calm, just as suddenly as he had been seized by horror. It seemed to him somehow that the men taking him to the Courthouse had a sort of sympathy for him; perhaps they knew that he hadn't been able to help it. They too would have read the story of what he had done in the paper all those weeks and weeks ago, in the Winter, and now it was Spring. He would have given anything to have walked in the street. He could feel the wheels of the motor police-van moving smoothly over the asphalt. He wondered if people were already in the Courthouse waiting to see him? Would there be anybody with him, or would he have to stand there alone?

Here we are, said one of the men.

The van stopped, and they helped him down. There were movements, he sensed a sort of crowd, he heard whisperings. Before he was taken in, and they took him in as quickly as they could, he heard someone say, It's the murderer. He's blind....

Well, he was up against it now. They led him to a seat and he sat down; one of the men went away; the Court wasn't sitting yet, they had told him, the judge hadn't come. They thought his counsel would

very likely come down for a minute. His counsel? Oh, yes, Mr. Pons. He had told Mr. Pons everything yesterday. Mr. Pons had said there was very little to go on. Of course there was very little to go on. A quarrel. Then he hadn't known.

You say there was no iron bar, there? Mr. Pons had said.

I don't remember an iron bar, said Hans.

I have to tell you, said Mr. Pons, that they found an iron bar there.

Hans was silent. Was there or was there not an iron bar? He tried to make out the exact truth. He felt that somewhere in his brain there was an idea of there having been something, a hard substance in his hand; but then again, what afterwards had he done with it? Perhaps the idea, which he didn't accept, of the iron bar was only in his brain because they had put it there. Perhaps they had put the iron bar not only into his brain but into the workshop.

He said this to Mr. Pons. Couldn't someone have put the bar into the workshop afterwards?

It was Mr. Pons's turn to be silent. Hans couldn't tell, but he had the impression that Mr. Pons was considering him rather than his proposition.

Mr. Pons said, Unfortunately, there was blood on it, my man.

Suddenly something came to him that he had never thought of before; he was amazed that he should have forgotten it.

Was it, he asked Mr. Pons, a loose rail in the iron railing on the stone stairs? He remembered a loose rail.

Yes, said Mr. Pons, there was a loose rail.

Couldn't Broido, he said, have fallen against it and knocked it out and so there would be blood on it, as Broido fell down the stairs?

The rail, said Mr. Pons, was found at the top of the stairs, not at the bottom.

He thought the voice of Mr. Pons was getting colder and colder.

And thinking of the cold voice of Mr. Pons, he found at the same time that it was colder in the room or cell at the Courthouse than it had been in his cell at the gaol; yet outside there was warmth of Spring.

The whole long conversation with Mr. Pons continued to run in his head; he went over it again and again, trying to see whether there wasn't anything else he could tell him, should he come down, as the men said he would, before the trial began. There was nothing. But what had he told him?

Well, his friendship with Broido——

He was an older man than you? said Mr. Pons.

Yes.

How strong was he? Was he stronger than you?

He was very strong, said Hans. Much stronger than me.

How do you know that?

Oh, said Hans, he could do what he liked with me. He could hold any of us with his hands, and we couldn't get away. He could wrestle, he wrestled with me, lifted me off the ground, yet he didn't let me fall. We used to do it for fun. He said it was good for us.

Do you think he could see? Perhaps you can't say.

He pretended he could see. I don't know. I mean, see a little. He told me sometimes he could see dim shapes, and see when they moved. He was in the blind workshop. To outside people he pretended.

In your quarrel with him, then, you couldn't see, and he, in his way, could?

Yes, Hans supposed that was about it.

So he could see a little better than you, and he was stronger, yet you managed to throw him down the stone stair?

Hans considered. Perhaps he fell down the stairs, he said.

Mr. Pons said, well, if we say he did we will have to

give a reason for it. Now the quarrel. You had a quarrel, and then you hit him?

Yes.

Did he hit you?

Yes.

You said nothing about this, about your being hit? Hans shook his head. Did he hit you hard? Was there any sort of bruise?

Hans shook his head again. He couldn't remember. He wasn't even sure about the blow. It wasn't the blow, he said, it was the words, the wicked lies.

Yes, yes, I know, said Mr. Pons, a little irritably. You can't remember if he hit you first?

No, said Hans, he didn't hit me first. I hit him, at least I hit out, not knowing exactly, and my fist struck him, but not hard. We were sitting together, caning. And after that he hit me.

And after that?

I don't remember.

A difficult case, said Mr. Pons, seemingly to himself. A motive, yes, the Crown will make the most of the motive. But it's not proof.

Then Mr. Pons said, You were talking a long time before you hit out with your fist?

Yes, he said, a long time. He had been at me for a long time, days it was, but I didn't pay attention, I

thought it was only his way, he got sort of savage at times, being blind and not being ready to make the best of it. Used to snap people up: but not often me; we was always friends.

In a pause Mr. Pons asked, And when did you cease to be friends?

We never ceased to be friends, said Hans. Only I couldn't let him go on.

Go on? Go on doing what?

Saying that Stephanie was a no-good.

Again Mr. Pons seemed to be considering him.

What do you mean, that he had been at you for a long time?

Talking about Stephanie I mean, saying nasty things, trying it seemed like to put me against her.

Did he know this girl before you did? said Mr. Pons quickly.

Hans didn't know. Not for certain. Sometimes he thought yes, sometimes no.

And the girl, what did she say?

She never said anything. We only talked about him as my friend.

Was this girl your mistress? said Mr. Pons.

Hans didn't understand.

Well, did you sleep with her? said Mr. Pons tersely.

No, no, he said, never. Somehow Mr. Pons saying it shocked him.

I see, said Mr. Pons, I see.

But Hans didn't know what he saw. He could only wonder whether Mr. Pons, out of his cleverness and all that he knew, wasn't seeing, as an awful truth, just that which he absolutely denied. No, Stephanie was straight. Mr. Pons was wrong; she had never had anything to do with Broido. He would shout that at the judge till he was black in the face.

But Mr. Pons was speaking. Yes, a cold voice, yet at the back of it he felt there was a something, not sympathy but interest, a patient interest, and of course cleverness. He could feel that. It didn't follow that this great man would understand, but he was at least trying to.

He said, Going back to the question of sight, how do you know, beyond his telling you, that Broido could see at all?

Well, said Hans, I suppose he must have been able to see something because he used to fetch me every day, and other men too, and take us to the workshop.

The blind leading the blind, muttered Mr. Pons.

But he couldn't see much, only shapes, and see them moving, said Hans.

And you? What can you see?

Nothing, said Hans, nothing. He wondered that Mr. Pons didn't know that. He added, Only the difference between night and day.

What, said Mr. Pons, was the nature of the friendship between you and this man?

Hans didn't quite understand; he said that they were just friends, they seemed to get on together; Broido liked him, but perhaps also he liked the feeling of being able to look after somebody, of having somebody he could take care of; it would make him feel not so bad himself.

Mr. Pons took this in, saying, Yes, yes. You are no fool, Segal, but so far you are not helping me much.

Hans was silent. He wanted, terribly, to help Mr. Pons, but what else could he do but answer the questions truthfully?

Tell me, then, why, when this had happened, did you go to the Pompadour Café? What took you there?

It was near, said Hans, simply.

Were you known there?

Oh, yes, they knew all us blind men there.

I see. Was there also a girl there?

Yes, said Hans, Magdalena.

Ah, said Mr. Pons. Now had you or Broido had

anything to do, at any time, with Magdalena? You know what I mean.

Not me. And I don't think Bro. We were all afraid of the Greek.

Very puzzling, said Mr. Pons. But he did not give up; not even in the blind workshop when they were teaching him to cane had Hans known such patience.

Mr. Pons said, You and Broido had no money quarrels?

No, said Hans, we had no money.

No money?

So little, said Hans, enough for a few cigarettes, some coffee in the café.

What other women did you know?

Well, there was Mina Roos, said Hans, we both knew her.

That was where you lived?

Yes.

Segal, said Mr. Pons, you are not telling me everything about Mina Roos.

So Hans told him. Not everything, not that Mina had come and made her sexual demands on him, she had come when it had suited her and when it had suited her she had left him. He couldn't tell that to Mr. Pons; it somehow, when he put it into words, offended his manhood, yet deep within he had no

quarrel with it. But he did tell Mr. Pons that he had slept with her.

Did Broido know this?

Yes.

Had he known Mina Roos before?

Yes.

Intimately?

Hans thought so.

So he was jealous of you?

No, he was already tired of Mina Roos before he took me to De Lorentz Street.

Are you sure?

Oh, yes, said Hans. And anyhow Mina Roos went off afterwards with Bernardus.

Mr. Pons gave a gentle sigh.

Hans, he said, you are doing your best, but I wish you could do more. The Crown, you see, can establish a motive as to why you should have killed this man.

A quarrel over a girl; a good girl, you say, and he taunts you with an assertion of her immorality; you are angry; you hit out. Well and good; you have a motive; never mind the rest. But what I am looking for is the motive of Broido in so taunting you with his assertions of immorality when, so far as you were concerned, they were unjustified. If you are hiding something from me, and Broido had a motive not

discreditable to him, so much the worse for you. If we can prove a motive that was discreditable, we do at least increase the belief of the Court in the possibility of accident. Accident after the blow——

But, said Hans, it wasn't an accident. I had to stop him, I had to.

Hans, said Mr. Pons slowly, it takes a very clever man to say exactly what he has done or what he has seen even half an hour after the occurrence. It is now many weeks since the night of your quarrel. I am going to defend you on the assumption of accident, of chance; there's no other way. But what reason had Broido—you must tell me if you know—for slandering this girl to you?

It was the heart of the problem. He did not know the reason. The only reason could have been that Broido was speaking the truth, he was saying what he knew. Which Hans denied. Yet Hans himself didn't know. No one knew. Unless Broido knew.

He sat there in the prison, in front of Mr. Pons, twisting his fingers. If he hadn't been able to think things out in two months, he couldn't do it now in half an hour. He could never explain all that to Mr. Pons, he couldn't put it into words. How could he say that Broido had no other motive but the truth, the desire to warn him against a girl who was really

bad though he thought her good, when it was exactly the truth of this that he so strenuously denied? At the same time his heart had been filled ever since with the blackest suspicions, the most awful doubts. These too, he had denied, moving about in his cell and shouting, shouting that he didn't believe it, that he would never believe it. What then was there that he could say to Mr. Pons? If only Mr. Pons could find out and tell him the truth about Stephanie!

After a few more questions, Mr. Pons had gone away.

And now here again was Mr. Pons, speaking briskly to him. His heart gave a thump, it went on thumping, because he knew that in a few minutes now he would be facing the Court, he would be in the presence of the judge.

Did you sleep well? said Mr. Pons. Did you eat your breakfast?

Yes, said Hans, and he had been thinking. Eagerly, breathlessly, he began telling Mr. Pons how after all he thought it must have been an accident. Couldn't they say that he and Broido had been hitting each other in fun? And anyway the first thing he had said afterwards at the café was that Broido had fallen down the stairs. Didn't that show that really he had thought so? He was blind, and couldn't see....

Mr. Pons calmed him. Sit down, he said. I am going to make out the best case I can for you, but I don't see how I am going to get over this matter of the iron bar. The doctor's evidence will also be against you. When I have done what I can, I think I shall put you up to tell your own story. Tell it straight, and be honest. The judge will know if you tell lies. What sort of life did you have at the Roos's?

A happy one, said Hans.

Well fed? said Mr. Pons.

Yes, said Hans. Ma Roos couldn't do enough. And they liked my music.

Music, said Mr. Pons quickly, what music?

I used to play to them, said Hans.

Good God, said Mr. Pons, is there anything else you've kept for the last few minutes before we go into court? What sort of music?

It was clear that Mr. Pons thought this matter of the music important. Oh, all sorts of music, said Hans, hymns and songs and Mendelssohn and jazz.

Ah, said Mr. Pons, and Broido was a musician too?

No, said Hans.

Mr. Pons seemed disappointed. Well, he said, it seems to me that here perhaps we have a little light on the obscurity of the actions, and words, of Broido. Is it not possible that he was jealous of your ability,

of your gift—for playing hymns and Mendelssohn—which would be a point which you, in your simplicity, might well not understand, or even suspect? With your music you may, without knowing it, have charmed, seduced, this girl away from your friend, and in a fit of envy and jealousy, Broido——

But Hans was not listening. He was thinking that for Stephanie he had seldom played; nor had he played his music that evening when first he had heard her voice and she and her cousin Bernardus with Mina and Broido and himself had gone back to De Lorentz Street, and that night no one had asked him to play. He remembered too, that when that same night Sophie in her coarse cotton nightgown had come to his room he had made her go back to bed. They whispered a little, but presently she had gone. He had wondered what he was going to do about Sophie, for already Stephanie was filling all his thoughts....

That at least said Mr. Pons, is one of the points we shall be able to make. What musical instrument are you able to play?

Hans felt in his pocket, though he knew there was nothing in it; it was sheer habit. It was, he said, the mouth-organ.

What! said Mr. Pons in a loud voice. There were

other things besides surprise in the tone, a complex tone, in which Mr. Pons had uttered that single word. It seemed to Hans that Mr. Pons might almost be angry.

But the next minute he laughed. Well, he said, perhaps we won't make too much of that point.

Then, It's nearly time, he said; they will bring you up as soon as the judge is in court and we have got the jury.

And Mr. Pons hurried away.

Hans for a moment felt his mind go blank, completely blank. Then as his thoughts came back to him he felt only a frightful effect as of eternal solitude, it seemed to him that without Mr. Pons he had suddenly stepped into a loneliness that was utterly unbearable. He was alone, in an empty world. Yet not alone; he was one man, blind, condemned to fight with only his poor wits against an implacable world. It came to him that perhaps he had only dreamt of Mr. Pons, that when he went into court there would be no Mr. Pons, but only the prosecutor and the judge and the jury, and none of them would be able to understand that not he but some sort of necessary chance had killed Broido, bloody bastard that he was for telling lies about Stephanie. Hell, he would go into court and swear and curse, he would bully them,

show them he was a man, show there was nobody was going to be allowed to take liberties with him, not Broido, not the bloody judge. He would tell them everything, all about Mina and Sophie and Ma Roos, about Magdalena and the Greek, about Broido and the low-down houses he sometimes went to. Yes, he would show them what sort of a world it was, with no pretence, that he the blind man had to find his way about in. He would tell them about Richards, how Richards was blind because of disease, that rotten disease that was everywhere; how Meiring was blind because of ignorance and stupidity, the doctor had said, because of the sun and the flies when he was a helpless infant. He would tell them what it was like to be blind and in prison, for only two months; that there was nothing so terrible as a locked door, a door locked on a blind man. He would say that the whole world was rotten, it was so rotten that he would rather be hanged and go with Broido than stay in it.

His hands were together, the fingers tightly interlocked; sweat was pouring down his face, he was not conscious of the chill air in the stone cell below the Court of Justice itself; he sat perfectly still, his muscles tense, as his mind staggered threateningly about the world of his own existence.

They came to take him to his place in court. For a second he stood erect, then without warning his knees gave, there was no strength anywhere in his body, and he would have crashed to the ground had they not caught him.

Pull yourself together, Hans, they said.

And again the man with the kindly voice saying to him, We mustn't keep the judge waiting, got him to his feet, and at once, it seemed they were going up some stone stairs and, miraculously it was, he found that he could walk without any assistance at all.

CHAPTER VI

He is in court. He is aware only of a confused murmur as he comes in, which is almost immediately stilled. The murmur is about him. There is no resonance from above, so the roof must be high. The court is perhaps like a concert-hall, wide, with a high roof. There will be nobody to tell him what it is like. The men stand back, or else they go away; he supposes he is in the dock; Miss Gray, reading to them, used to read out, the prisoner stood in the dock. He stands now in the dock, waiting with folded hands.

A voice of authority says, Let the accused have a chair.

Hans thinks it must be the judge. One of the men puts a chair in the dock and taking his arm indicates the position of the chair; he indicates also the rail, and Hans finds that only his head and shoulders come above the rail. Before he goes the man whispers, The judge is on your left. It was the judge said you could have a chair.

Sitting now and resting his arms on the high rail of

the dock he waits. He feels strangely calm, he feels that his head has never been clearer; yes, when the time comes he will be able to give a good account of himself; but he must listen, he must listen to everything as he has never listened before; he has only voices to go on, he mustn't miss an accent, not a tone. He could tell nothing from the voice of the judge, it was a low, penetrating bass voice completely without bias, non-committal. The Court is very still; they are all waiting, there is a sense of expectancy in the air; somebody will have to begin. Yet the moments of waiting, truly only a matter of seconds, seem at the same time an eternity in which everything has been done and the affair is over. Except that he does not know whether he has been condemned or set free.

A voice breaking the stillness seems now to him like a stone shattering a sheet of glass.

It is not Mr. Pons. It must of course be the prosecutor. Every word of the prosecutor's he must hear and store up, for the prosecutor will tell the story in his own way, and he and Mr. Pons must show that the story is wrong, they must note all the mistakes of fact that the prosecutor will make. Oh, it will be easy. He has no reason any longer for alarm, now that the prosecutor has begun. And swinging along in an even voice, but not going too fast, this man who is against

him tells the Court the story of the two men and of the evening which saw the death of one of them.

He has a good voice, rather musical, but one feels that he is keeping something in reserve, he will have other notes with which to make his effects. Hans knows this, instinctively; the present tones of the man's voice are such that he says that this man will use his voice as one uses a musical instrument; this is not talking, this is a piece of music of which there will be a beginning, a middle and an end.

The prosecutor says that this case with which he has to deal is a case of a quarrel between two men, resulting in the death of one of them. There were no witnesses. Both men were blind. Also they were understood to be friends.

A quarrel must have a cause, it must be about something. He would have no difficulty in proving, in fact it was common ground between himself and counsel for the defence, that the quarrel was about a girl.

He did not think that it would be necessary actually to bring this girl into the case; she was not present at the catastrophe, no one was, but in view of the quarrel and the things that had apparently been said about her, he and his colleague were agreed that she should not be called to give evidence, further, with his lord-

ship's permission they were agreed that her name also should be kept out of the case.

Very well, says the judge. The case may proceed on those terms, provided you let me know who proposed that the young woman should not be called. And you had better, Mr. Stanley, let me have the name. But you and Mr. Pons must not assume from this that I may not, in the course of the case, require the young woman to be called.

The precise words, the low precise reverberating voice struck a chill into Hans. He remained leaning with his arms spread-eagled on the rail of the dock, and his chin rested on his overlapping wrists. But despair now was suddenly in his mind; this was no judge, this was God himself; never before had so dread an impression of awfulness taken possession of him as that which now came to him from listening to the judge. The judge was God, and Mr. Stanley was the Archangel Michael; what could Mr. Pons do? Nothing, he said, nothing. They could just watch the case, he and Mr. Pons, beginning and slowly coming to an end foreordained. He must listen, yes, but it was not Hans listening, it was a creature fascinated, hypnotised.

He hears, then, Mr. Stanley saying that he was not now concerned with causes but with facts. He would

bring evidence to show that the death of Broido was brought about by a blow or blows from an iron bar. That iron bar had been found, blood-stained, on the landing at the top of the stone stairway; the body of the murdered man had been found at the bottom.

He would bring medical evidence to show that the death of Broido was caused by this iron bar. He would prove the existence of the iron bar, the accused in his statement having said that Broido had fallen down the stairs. It was a euphemistic way of saying that he had been pushed, or thrown. The fact was that he had been attacked, with an iron bar, and knocked down the stairs.

These men were blind; it was said that they were friends. He would lead evidence as to their blindness. He would bring evidence in due course to prove that the dead man had been killed and could only have been killed by the accused. He repeated that at this stage he was not concerned with the reasons or motives for the crime.

Now a new voice speaks. It is the superintendent. She is nervous, he can at first only just hear Mr. Stanley say to her in a kind voice, You must speak up, you know.

She knows the two blind men, Broido and Segal?

Yes.

Would she say they were good friends?

Oh, yes.

She knew of no quarrel between them?

No.

She did not concern herself with the private affairs of the blind persons in her charge?

No, that was not her affair. The Board did that; they had their inspectors. Her business was to take orders for baskets and chair-caning at the workshop, and to see that the work was properly done. She was always careful of the men while in her charge, giving them hot tea at the proper time. She did occasionally on a Sunday take them, a batch at a time, to church.

A man's voice comes next. Ah, it's doctor. Well, doctor will be able to tell them which has the worst eyes, which of them can see and which can't.

These men were not born blind?

No.

Can you tell us something about them, the state of their eyes, the degrees of blindness?

Doctor says yes. He says, Segal to all intents and purposes is blind; he can only tell the difference between night and day; the full light of day makes on his retina the faintest of faint impressions; he cannot see objects at all, he is not even aware of objects however large, however near. Broido on the other hand

had very bad and very short sight, but it was a species of sight; he could see shapes, vaguely, at a distance several feet, but even at a few feet they were shapes only, not recognisable until he touched them. His sight was getting worse.

Yes, he said, these men had been his patients for a number of years, he treated them on behalf of the Society; he knew them well, he had tested them many times; it was not possible that he should be mistaken as to the degree to which they could or could not see.

Another witness with a voice rather like the short but not angry bark of a dog says that he was called to the scene of the crime on the morning of July 29th. He describes the scene in his barking voice, and Hans is sure that this must be a police witness; he listens carefully; he too wants to know everything. The man says that on the landing, on the stairs and at the foot of the stairs there were blood-stains.

There is a perceptible sound of movement in court, faint, like people shifting slightly and taking an unexpected breath. The word blood rings in his ears disturbingly; he cannot see it, not even in his head, but he remembers the feel of it on his hands when he had tried to lift Broido and had found that he was limp, lifeless, perhaps dead.

The bark continues to describe the workshop; nothing in the workshop was disarranged.

Mr. Pons then says, You saw no iron bar?

No, said the bark; his colleague the night before had removed the iron bar.

Another witness, a doctor, says that the blood-stains were human blood.

God! are there a hundred witnesses, one for every little thing?

And the iron bar? says Mr. Stanley. Were there blood-stains on that?

Yes.

Mr. Pons asks a question, too. He says, Did you see this iron bar before it was taken from the workshop, or wherever it was, or afterwards?

No. He had examined it at the charge office.

This iron bar! Will they never have done? It is hitting me over the head!

No, they haven't done.

A new voice says that accompanying the district surgeon to the scene of the crime, he had seen and taken charge of the iron bar; he had removed it to the charge office; it was now an exhibit in court.

God! they are all looking at it, and I alone can't see it! This is a terrible iron bar. If I say I used this

iron bar I cannot say I am telling the truth, because I don't know.

Mr. Stanley speaks. Where did you find this exhibit?

On the landing, says the man, at the top of the stairs.

Hans waits, but Mr. Pons says nothing. Is he not going to ask about the loose rail? The sweat breaks out on him again as he thinks that perhaps Mr. Pons has forgotten, or does not consider it worth while.

Another witness, no, it is the superintendent again, says that she was not aware of any iron bar in the workshop; they had no use for such a thing.

You say, says Mr. Pons, that as far as you know there was no such object as this iron bar in the workshop?

No.

You can think of no reason why anyone should have brought it in?

Mr. Pons' voice was colder and harder than ever, yet Hans began to tremble with a sort of suppressed excitement.

No, says the superintendent.

Ah! says Mr. Pons.

And there is an echo in Hans's mind. He knows what Mr. Pons means by that; some doubt has at least

been thrown on the existence of the iron bar, even if it is, as he supposes, lying there before them on a table in court.

Magdalena it is that then swears that she saw him come into the Pompadour Café. He was very white. Yes, he had his hat on. He looked very bad, very white and as though he might faint. Yes, she knew him well, she knew both the men well; they were great friends. No, Hans came in alone; no one was with him. She could see he was bad. She went to him and helped him to a chair. His hat fell off. She noticed at once that there was blood on his coat. It was all stained.

Mr. Pons asks a question. How did you know that the stains on the coat were blood?

Magdalena says that she knew because it came off on her hands when she helped Hans to a chair.

Mr. Stanley wants to know something. Were his hands also stained or were they clean?

They were clean, she says, and smelt of soap.

The superintendent is recalled, but Hans does not listen. Things that he did not know are being added to the business of that dreadful night. The iron bar that he had perhaps in his rage picked up, but his rage was such that he had forgotten; the thing went out of his head as though it had never been. And now his

hands. Yes, of course he remembers the blood on them. Yet in the café they were clean. Of course they were clean. Had he not gone up the stone stairs again, slowly, laboriously, to wash them? The superintendent has just explained that there was a wash-basin in a lavatory close to the stone landing; all the men were encouraged to be clean and tidy.

The man with the voice like a dog's bark said that there were stains which seemed to be blood both on the basin and on the towel which was hanging on a roller behind the door.

Hans! Hans! he says, these things would not have been if only you had been able to see. It is cruel, cruel. You can do nothing. Only Mr. Pons is standing between you and——

But he mustn't think of it. He mustn't think of anything; he must give his whole attention to the proceedings in court. Sitting upright and taking his arms off the rail of the dock he says that, Mr. Pons or no, he must fight this thing, he must fight for his life. Yes, he must make a fight for it. One day he would meet Stephanie again....

They tell him that the Court will adjourn for lunch. Somehow he finds it difficult to believe this; how strange to think that judges and all the men engaged in fighting over a man's life should have to

stop for lunch. But they do stop. And the men take him out of the Court and down the narrow stone stairway to the cell underneath, and presently, he too, is actually eating, an astonishing action in which also he can scarcely believe. Much more does it seem a dream. A dream in which there are the sensations, the tastes and the smells, of food, of hot mutton and potatoes and strong cabbage, and on another plate more than he can eat of sweet rice-pudding, yet the fact of eating makes less impression, the imagination is much stronger than the fact, it might all be imagination, he says, using his spoon and the end of a finger, feeling his way, for his food has been cut up for him, and anyway, as they told him long ago at the prison, prisoners do not have a knife and fork. For him, all his life, everything has had to be cut up; at the beginning of every meal, every dinner-time, he has had to wait and to listen to someone cutting up the food on his plate. Why couldn't they let him do it for himself? They could let him try. Yet he had never asked. So with a hundred other things, on which he had to depend on people. At least he could shave himself. So now, in this crisis of his life, he was forced to depend on other people, on Mr. Pons and Mr. Pons alone. He felt that if he could see, if he could note the faces of witnesses, watch the judge and

the jurymen, keep an eye on Mr. Stanley, if only he *knew* what was going on around him where he stood or sat in the dock in the Courthouse, he would have a better chance. But he can only hear. Hearing and sight are not two things which added together make two; this is not addition but multiplication, and they multiply up to a hundred times. If only he could see Mr. Stanley, when he asks those awkward questions. He remembered washing his hands, yet if he had been able to see he would have left no stains on the wash-basin or on the towel.

The stains on his hands had only come—had they not?—from trying to lift Broido.

And Broido was bleeding because he had fallen down the stairs, he had hit his head against the sharp edges of the stone stairs.

But the iron bar? The iron railing?

He didn't know what to do with that; he couldn't fit it in. Supposing he had it, chance only it was that had caused Broido to be hit over the head with it. How could he know where Broido's head was? He couldn't see.

And Mr. Pons coming in at that moment, after lunch and before going back into court, he said this to him, reaching out and touching the advocate's gown. But Mr. Pons said that he had decided on a

different line; he was going to put it that the iron railing was never in his hands at all; Hans must leave it to him; it was not possible to advance both hypotheses, they were mutually contradictory.

So Hans was silent. Mr. Pons must know what he was doing, he was certainly not disturbed, it seemed, by the evidence so far led. His very voice was less chilly, less precise, but Hans could not tell whether it was because Mr. Pons was pleased with the case or whether it was because he had lunched well and the walk in the sun had warmed him up.

I suppose you did wash your hands? he said.

Hans nodded.

Well, we will allow that. You can say that you got blood on your hands trying to pick Broido up.

Well, that's true, said Hans; and Mr. Pons laughed.

Everything's true, said Mr. Pons. We have to get at the truth of the truth.

Which Hans did not comprehend.

I shall, I think, put you in the box to-morrow.

To-morrow? said Hans, in consternation.

Yes; it will take the afternoon to get through the rest of the evidence. You must just listen; don't do anything. To-morrow you will be able to tell your own story in your own way. That's your best chance. I shall do my best to prepare the ground for you by my

cross-examination of the witnesses this afternoon.

God! said Hans, more witnesses?

Yes. The Greek. Mrs. Roos. The district surgeon. I think the judge will let the girl stay out. But I'm not sure. You never know.

And Mr. Pons went away.

How easy it was for Mr. Pons to come and go, moving airily about, like some strange light-footed bird. He would do his best, he said; yes, Hans felt that he would do that, but he did not hold out hope, he held out nothing; he was coldly, calmly doing his job. And in all the world Hans had no friend to stand by him, to help him, to encourage him. If only Broido——

Sometimes it was difficult to believe, in fact it was impossible to believe that Broido was dead. In the darkness of his mind he would stretch out his hands, feeling for Broido, this friend of his, this man who had been so much to him, a friend, yet more than a friend, a sort of master in whom he had placed implicit trust. And there was no one else. Broido was the only friend he had. Everyone needs friends, but how much more so when you are blind! And how tremendous, how overwhelming the need when you are in trouble. Christ! he said, if only he had Broido to help him now; Broido would know what to do and what to say, better than Mr. Pons; they would just

laugh at this idiotic idea of one blind man being able to kill another; with an iron bar. Broido would understand, and would be able to tell the judge, exactly how it had happened. If Hans was in a mess, Broido would get him out of it; he would then go back to Ma Roos, he would hear again the music that was Stephanie's voice.

But Broido, had he not said that Stephanie—that Stephanie was——

He would go mad; he didn't care what happened to him; what was the use of fighting? Mr. Pons could go home; it was no use; he was at the end of things, he didn't want to live, not without Stephanie, without Broido; not without knowing that Stephanie was good and pure, a girl that didn't go with men, a girl that would at last come to him alone, they would marry, people would help them, it would be all right; yet Broido had said——

He was in court again, sitting on the chair which the judge said he could have in the dock, a voice of authority, but it was a kind action, he knew that prisoners did not usually have a chair. Everybody else sat, and the prisoner stood; all day long; why? Sometimes the prisoner had done nothing, he was discharged, but he stood all day in the dock.

Now they are asking the Greek. The Greek is one

of them foreigners. He hasn't really a voice at all with tones and inflections, he says words but the sound is like someone moving a door on stiff and rusty hinges, moving it not slowly but quickly.

The Greek says that he knew the men, they were customers of his. Oh, a long time; good quiet men, never any trouble, he didn't like trouble. Yes, Magdalena, his assistant, had called out that there was blood on the prisoner's coat; the prisoner looked very bad; he hadn't looked at the coat himself. There seemed to be something wrong, so he sent for the polis. Prisoner had said that his friend had fallen down the stairs.

You detained him, says Mr. Stanley, till the police came?

No, says the Greek, he detain himself. He never try to run away.

Did you have any reason to suppose, says Mr. Pons, that it was not an accident?

No.

Yet you sent for the police, says Mr. Stanley.

Well, says the Greek, what else could he do? He couldn't send for the fire-brigade.

There is some laughter, which instantly stops.

Hans does not understand. What use, he says, are all these questions? When will the judge say something? The judge knows Stephanie's name, and Mr.

Pons and Mr. Stanley and no one else. Or does everybody know it? Everybody, and they are laughing at him. Why hadn't he asked Mr. Pons if Stephanie was in court? The judge knows her name, he can call her, he can suggest that Miss Stephanie Retief be called to give her testimony. But he knows no more, he has not heard her voice, he has never seen her. To Hans, then, it seems that the judge is of less account than this prisoner to whom the voice of Stephanie is a golden song and Stephanie herself not a name on a piece of paper but a miraculous reality.

Ma Roos takes the oath. The truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. The rich rolling accents of Ma Roos fill the court.

The accused lived with you? says Mr. Stanley.

He lived in my house, says Ma Roos, and there is a titter in court.

That is what I meant, says Mr. Stanley. He was friendly with you and your daughters?

Oh, yes.

What would you say was his temper? Was he good-tempered or did he have sudden attacks of rage, of ill-temper?

I never saw him angry all the time. If all of us was as sweet-tempered as Hans——

Yes, yes. Now what exactly, in your opinion,

was the relationship between the accused and the deceased?

They were the best of friends.

No quarrels—over girls, for instance?

Ma Roos said that she had never known them to quarrel.

Now this girl, that they quarrelled over, did Mrs. Roos know her?

Hans was now leaning forward, his arms on the rail, his chin resting on his hands; he felt that everyone in court was leaning forward; there was absolute silence. It was the first time anyone had referred to her. It was so strange to him to hear Stephanie thus brought in, nameless, this girl about whom there was a quarrel, a mystery woman, and they would all be wondering who she was. Some would know, but only a few.

Yes, she knew the girl.

Please put your mind to this, Mrs. Roos, it is very important. Did your lodger and his friend never have words over this girl?

Never, said Ma Roos, with the fullness of tone of a great organ.

No quarrels, no jealousies, no bitter words?

No. I've told you, said Ma.

One moment, says Mr. Pons; would you say, Mrs.

Roos, that these two men were equally sweet-tempered? You have said that Hans Segal was sweet-tempered; would you say that Broido was the same?

Everybody waits; Hans can feel that everybody sees the point at which Mr. Pons is driving.

Ma Roos says, No.

Broido was not sweet-tempered?

No.

Then if they did not quarrel it was due more to the good temper of Hans than to Broido?

Yes.

Thank you, says Mr. Pons.

Sitting still, waiting for the next witness, Hans feels a strong light as when his face is turned to the sun. Ah, of course it is the sun, he feels the warmth, it must be shining in on him from windows on the opposite side of the Courthouse. It is the afternoon, he does not know the time; somewhere about the middle of the afternoon. He has no energy; even his energy of attention is spasmodic. There are things the witnesses have said which he has missed. Why do they call them witnesses? No one was there. All this other evidence has not really anything to do with it. They will have to wait, the judge will have to wait, until Mr. Pons puts him in the box; then they will know all that there is to know. He alone can tell them. It

will be very simple; they will see that it had to happen, that it was inevitable, yet it had happened without the idea of it ever coming into his head.

Again there is a stir in the court, which for a moment he does not understand; but soon he does, and feels the same stir in himself arousing him from the lethargic state into which he was falling, because this witness now is the most important of all, he is the man who has come nearest to the crime, nearest to the dead man, for this important witness is the district surgeon.

Hans leans even further forward so that he may lose no word; once more he has the feeling that everybody else is doing the same, leaning forward; but not the judge.

The swearing-in of the witness is no more than a mumble, but as soon as he speaks Hans listens to his voice, at first, rather than to his words in order that he may try to assess in his own mind something of the character of this man in whose hands he is. But the voice doesn't tell him much, it is strangely hesitant, but the hesitancy of one seeking absolute fairness, precision of statement in a case where only the greatest care can penetrate the doubts that obscure the truth. Though the voice is in this way hesitant, seeking, in pauses, the right word, the correct expression,

the sound of it is soft, not unmusical. It has an accent, a sort of purr, which Hans cannot place.

The district surgeon says that he was informed of the occurrence that same evening; he went to the scene with the inspector of police and another man within an hour, as it happened, of the information being received at the charge office. The body was still warm. The man had lost a lot of blood. He examined the body carefully at the time, and the next morning, at the mortuary, he made a more detailed examination. The man had been hit in the face, probably with a fist, for there was a general slight bruising over the left cheek below the eye; but the cause of death was a series of blows on the head itself that could only, he thought, have been given by a weapon, a blunt not a sharp instrument, and of considerable weight. He could not say whether the man had fallen or had been thrown down the stone stairs, but it was clear, from the blood traces, that he had been attacked at the top of the stairs.

Would the sole exhibit in the case, says Mr. Stanley, this iron bar which is on the table, be the type of instrument to have caused these wounds?

Yes, says the hesitant voice, it could be.

How many wounds were there on the head?

It is difficult to say. Perhaps half a dozen; there

might be more; not less than four or five; one blow at least was so severe that it may have obliterated the underlying signs of others. Or others may have come on top.

Could you associate the strength of the prisoner with these blows?

There is a long pause. Hans waits.

The district surgeon says, slowly, It is not impossible.

Would you tell us—it is Mr. Pons beginning the attack: it seems to Hans that the moment has come, he marvels, at the dry, cold voice, like the sharp edge of a diamond, of Mr. Pons in which there seem to be no feelings but only a cold intelligence. If only he could *see* Mr. Pons, standing up now to defend him. Mr. Pons alert, cold, intelligent; he, the prisoner, warm, yet on the point of shivering, trembling, he feels that he will have to put his hand to his mouth so that it shall not betray him.

Would you tell us, says Mr. Pons, whether you saw this iron bar when you visited the premises within an hour of the death of Broido?

No, I was concerned with the dead man; I saw no iron bar; I did not look.

Did you see it at the charge office?

No. I was not there. I was at the mortuary.

This, then, say Mr. Pons, is the first time you have seen the instrument?

Yes.

You went up the stairs that night?

Yes.

Did you notice whether there was or was not a gap in the iron railings of the stairway? Whether, on the landing rather, there was or was not a missing rail?

There was a poor light. I noticed nothing.

Would it surprise you to learn that the iron bar in front of us, with which it is said that a crime has been committed, is nothing more than a railing that was loose at the top of these tiresome stone stairs?

If you say so, Mr. Pons, it is not my business to dispute it.

Quite so. The accused, more observant than others in spite of his blindness, will tell us that there *was* a loose rail in the iron balustrade, which I will corroborate with the testimony of another blind man, and the proof lies still further in the fact that there is now actually a gap in that balustrade, which I have seen, and it is an easy matter to fit the bar before us to that gap.

Where are you leading us, Mr. Pons? asks the judge.

I am coming to that, my lord. There were no wit-

nesses of this incident, this accident. My defence will be to put the accused in the witness-box. He will tell us what he can, but there is a point beyond which he does not remember. His memory stops short of this iron bar.

Most opportune, says Mr. Stanley.

Yet it may be honest, says Mr. Pons, sharply. Now this iron bar or railing at the time of the quarrel was in its position, loosely, in the balustrade on the top landing. We don't know where the quarrel started, if it started anywhere; it had in fact been going on for some time, for some days, though it had escaped the notice of Mrs. Roos. But then these men, debarred from violence by their blindness, may indeed have kept their differences, over a girl, to themselves. It seems, however, that a crisis arose and blows were struck, not by one but by both, on the night in question as they were sitting at their work, alone, but for each other, in the workshop. A crisis arose and violence was used. It is difficult to see what harm they could do to each other, hitting blindly into the air.

How then, did the tragedy arise? I think we may assume either that these men in their blindness struggling with each other passed from the workshop to the landing, or that one broke off and groped his way

to the landing and the other followed. There again they struggled and in the conflict Broido fell or was thrown, though not deliberately, against the iron balustrade. It is within the bounds of reason to hold that he struck this bar, that was previously loose, with his head, which stunned him, and that therefore he fell, like a limp sack, from stone stair to stone stair till he lay at the bottom, his head cut and wounded in several places, as the witness has said, but by the sharp edges of the stone stairs following on the deep blow caused, as we have seen, by the iron railing up above.

Mr. Pons stopped speaking. There was a pause. It seemed to Hans that there was a sort of silent gasp of astonishment in court at Mr. Pons's reconstruction of the scene. Hans thought hard; could it have been like that?

Mr. Pons now says, Let me ask you this. Do you or do you not agree that the outline of events as I have described them was possible?

Hesitating, the district surgeon says that it was not impossible. But it was his duty to point out that on the head of the deceased all the blows went one way, they were more or less parallel, they lay all from the front to the back of the head, none of them lay directly across. He would have supposed that a limp

body hitting the stairs with its head, falling at random, would have shown a different pattern of blows or wounds on the skull.

Recalling a witness, Mr. Stanley asks, will you tell us again where you found this iron bar?

On the landing at the top of the stairs, says the man.

Are you sure? says Mr. Pons.

Yes.

Could anyone else have touched it?

No, he did not think so.

The doctor who examined the bar at the charge office, recalled by Mr. Pons, said that there was human blood on the bar but no human hairs adhering to it.

Mr. Pons says that he will now ask the district surgeon if he would not expect to find hairs on the bar, following several blows, whereas from one blow, such a blow as he had suggested, it might well be that no hairs would adhere.

The district surgeon says that it is at least a tenable hypothesis.

At the same time, says Mr. Stanley, if the man knocked out this loose bar on the edge of the landing with his head, one would expect to find it down below. Yet there was no bar down below?

No, said the hesitant voice, with its soft purr; there was no sign of it.

It seems to Hans that they have come to a deadlock; who can tell what happened? It is all supposings; nobody knows, he himself doesn't know. He will, of course, have to swear that. Yet there is something that haunts him in the thought of the iron bar. The thing that killed Broido. For it was the bar that killed him. He seemed now to see, no, not to see but to *feel* the shape of Broido near him, beside him; he was coming nearer; he was a sort of presence in the court.

Then suddenly he was so tired that his brain stopped working, he could feel it stopping, he might almost be dead; dead, yet aware passively of his surroundings, of what was going on, a witness recalled, trivial things said, aware as a man might be of things in which he has and can have no interest whatever....

One of the men takes his arm and leads him out of the dock and down the stone stairs. They drive him back to the prison. But before they get him into the van they have to push through a crowd that is full of talk, then immediately silent for the few moments it takes to get him up into the van. Yes, he *is* blind, they say. He couldn't have done it. He hears the very words.

Back in the prison, sitting on the pallet bed, he began thinking again, but as a different person. This was not himself, this person that was now thinking was a kind of spectator considering and wondering about the doings of that other person who had killed Broido. A man to kill his best friend. Over a girl. He regarded even Stephanie dispassionately. Well, he had come to the end of his tether, to the end of everything. He couldn't fight any more, he didn't care. Yes, he said of this other person, that is quite right, it's no use, he is too tired, he can't fight any more.

It was the end of the first day. What was a day? He was to be put into the box to-morrow. Perhaps there wouldn't be a to-morrow. He wouldn't go into the box. He would tell Mr. Pons to tell them that he did it; even if he didn't. He couldn't go on any more.

Yet when the warder brought him his supper, he was glad. Was it that he wanted something to do? He ate it all. When the warder came in again for the mug, the plate, the spoon, he found himself asking the warder what the paper said, about the trial. He astonished himself, and yet, he said, it was not surprising that he should want to know.

The warder said he couldn't say. He had on soft

slippers. The door closed and the key was turned in the lock. No sound could be more awful.

He was alone now, for hours and hours to be alone, midway through his trial before the judge. He could not tell what the judge was thinking. He wondered if the judge was thinking about him now. The silence was terrible; if only there was some sound, however slight, to which he could listen. His head was a burden, this thinking, without seeing and without talking—and all day that intensive listening—was too much for him. If only he could have had his music.

But he had nothing. He got up and moved about, feeling his way with outstretched hands, but he was so tired he could scarcely stand. Would he be able to sleep? He would like to go to sleep and not wake any more. Taking off his boots and his coat he lay down on the pallet bed; he pulled up the blanket; he was very sleepy....

CHAPTER VII

A DEEP, deep sleep and then a nightmare. It must have been a nightmare, he says, a frightful dream. The impression of visuality stays with him; only in dreams does he actually see, but dreams are very rare, and bad dreams rarer still. Awake now he kept for a moment the dreadful impression of his dreams; it was not of the Courthouse nor his trial nor even Broido; he saw in his dream the dam on the farm and fierce rain and a terrific wind; the animals about him were blown to the earth, cocks and hens were whirled into the air like torn pieces of newspaper; the trees are bending almost to the ground and there is water everywhere. He is standing in water, he can see it rushing past, swirling round his bare feet, yet he can feel neither the water nor the pressure of the wind. Then the house goes, the sides of it fall away, he sees the very bedclothes being snatched from the beds as though by an angry giant; his mother is trying to stop the beds from being blown away too. His father is over by the dam holding it up, holding together with

arms that are a hundred feet long the dam wall over the top of which the water is pouring already in a cataract. Then everything in the world disappears in a vast and foaming flood, which surges up and up and in the midst of which, terrified, he shrieks for help....

It seemed to him, awake now, that he must have yelled out in his sleep; never before had he done such a thing, yet he may have made no sound, a silent yell of fear, a shriek of the dumb. How awful to be dumb! How awful, how terrible to be deaf and dumb! There had never been a flood. The dam indeed had never been more than half full. How dry it was always, in that part of the Karroo! There couldn't be a flood. It was only a dream. Some people could tell you what dreams meant. He would like to know. So many things now, since he had begun to live the life of a man, did he want to know.

What time was it? How nice if there was a clock in the house which struck the hours. He wondered how soon it would be day, when Mina would bang on the door and shout to him that it was time to get up.

Only gradually did a doubt come into his mind, and feeling about, slowly, with his hands he touched the cell wall. It was the prison. The sudden realisation, out of deep sleep and a frightful dream, was like

a swift rush of blood, the shock was like a stab in the brain.

In prison. For a second he imagined that the trial was over, that he was condemned, he lived for a second all the horror of being condemned. Condemned to what? No, he was not condemned, it wasn't over, they hadn't found him guilty, they couldn't.

Sitting up on the hard pallet where he had been lying with his clothes on, only not his coat and he had also taken off his shoes, he found that he was trembling, not with fear, but with relief. The trembling wore off. Setting himself on the pallet-bed, with his back against the cell-wall and the blanket over his shoulders for it was chilly in the cell, the window was open, and the night air—it must be night—of early spring was chilly, he wanted, he said, to work this thing out.

He now knew what went on in the Courthouse, the ways of the people there, these men busy with this thing which he had done—they called it 'the case'—and he was better prepared, more in the know as to what could be done, than when he faced his trial that first day, which was only yesterday but it belonged already to some remote past; he must concern himself then, with his defence. Mr. Pons was going to put him in the box; he would have the chance of telling

his own story, of defending himself. But how? If he could write it out; if he could make it up, point by point, get it by heart, and so be sure of saying everything, of not making a mistake. It was wrong of Mr. Pons to leave it all to him; he was poor, ignorant, blind. What had he got to do? He had got to show that Broido was a brute, a strong rough fellow hurling insults at him, continually saying insulting things, vile things, against his girl; going on and on, giving him no rest; he was driven to it, any man would be driven to it; he would have to show the judge that even he, the judge, would be driven to it. Yet to what had he been driven? Was he going to say that he had, with the iron bar, hit Broido over the head a dozen times, was he going to make a confession of something he had no knowledge of doing?

Hitting his own head now with no force, many times against the wall of the cell he moaned and moaned. This thinking would send him mad. Broido was not a brute, he was strong but not rough, no one had been so gentle with him as Broido. And there in the night, on the prison bed, he kept on saying the word Broido to himself, but out loud, over and over again, Broido, his friend, his pal, repeating the name till it too felt like a beat in his brain. Then it stopped, the beat, and out of nothing there leapt at

him the sense of Broido dead, a new sense, a feeling of despair and loss, a sense of grief that he had not known.

He had always said that there was a limit, and Broido had reached the limit; all he did, had to do, was to shut the fellow up. Hitting out at last with his fists. Hitting into the air. Then a scuffle, like two dogs. But men, swearing at each other. The sort of thing that happens every day, nothing in it. An accident, and Broido had banged his head. Yes, all sorts of things since then, whole new worlds of thought to master. Yet never till now the ultimate truth, the full horror of it. And he the murderer, the man who killed his friend; intentions were nothing, nothing was anything—motives?—beside the fact that Broido was dead, and if he had not killed him he had made it so that Broido had killed himself. Where was the difference?

The dreadful silence was almost unbearable. God! if I were dead it would be better. Was it as dark in the cell as behind his sightless eyes? He did not know which was worse, the darkness or the loneliness. But was he alone? There was no sound. Yet he could not say that the cell was empty, that there was no one. He listened and in his mind—he knew it was in his mind, but what of that?—he was aware of a figure, a dim but

not less definite shape that was Broido. Broido was saying to him, why did you kill me? And he said, Broido, I had to. I didn't really do it, but I had to do something. You understand? No, said Broido, I won't understand! You didn't have to. Didn't you say, said Hans, that she was a no-good? I did, said Broido, but didn't you know it was a joke?

I didn't! I didn't! he said, flinging himself down on the ground, he lay on the floor of the cell, his finger-nails stiff on the smooth floor, his eye-sockets were burning with tears, his sobs were terrible. His words were incoherent, but his mind coherent. Don't tell me that, don't, don't! Yet instantly he knew that if only he could believe it, he would be saved; they might do what they liked with him, but he would be saved. Broido had come to save him from his doubt. So then was it all the more unbelievable that he should be dead, this man who thus put Stephanie back—but no, she could not be put back, because she had never moved, and crying and laughing he said that he had never doubted her, he had never lost faith.

But Broido? Was he there? Was he perhaps not dead?

Broido, he whispered.

But there was no answer. He knew there wouldn't

be. The sense he had of the dim shape was no longer there, the shape was no longer there. Broido had come and gone. Getting up from the floor and groping for the pallet where again he sat huddled up, Poor Hans! Poor Hans! he said; well, you are a prisoner now. A prisoner. You killed your friend. They won't let you go. Yet at the same time he wondered what it would be like if he were a prisoner and Broido was outside; would they let Broido come in to talk to him? And the idea of talking to Broido again let loose a thousand memories of comradeship, so that he forgot his dishevelled state, his tears, the discomfort; he was with Broido. At the very beginning Broido had taken him up, been kind to him, like a big strong brother saying in the lazy indolent way of strength, Hans? Oh, he's a decent kid; I'm lookin' after Hans.

That was five years ago, when Hans was seventeen. Between the farm, with its vague memories, and Broido there wasn't much, five years of being looked after, of doing nothing, what was there to remember? and then Broido and the Society's workshop and the living for a year or two at the Becks', but before that a nice family had had him, there were some girls but he was young, he had just felt happy, a growing lad, a little backward and then something had happened,

the old man lost his job, the family moved, he had to leave, and the Society had put him with the Becks.

He was living now not in the prison but out in the streets with Broido, at the workshop, at the Becks', walking up De Lorentz Street. His memories were talks, long desultory conversations; what else could they be? Broido said this, he said that; it was always Broido. A fine friend, a helper, someone to stand up for him. But there came a time when he was about twenty and was then living at the Becks', that he had felt uneasy; it seemed that Broido might perhaps come to be too much cock of the walk. It was Broido and his little dog Hans; he had done nothing, said nothing, and later on the feeling of being dominated had gone; he had come then to rely on Broido so much that it was second nature. He knew this, but as long as Broido was his friend? And anyway he had his inner life, a life which grew and was fostered by the very protection that Broido afforded him against the world; this inner life of music no less than the tranquillity of his days. He owed it all to Broido. For instance, the music; Broido, it seemed, had a little money, very little, but more than the rest of them, dependent as they were wholly on charity; and Hans showing his love for music on all occasions, and when he got the chance, his aptitude,

it was Broido bought for him the mouth-organ that gave him so much pleasure, it was like buying for him a piece of life. He bought him the mouth-organ, made him play to people, yet teased him and joked him about it at the same time as he let people know that Hans could play.

And all the time Broido didn't like music, he didn't care about it; he only listened when he had to, when there were other people; he didn't mind it in the café because he could talk. Yet he took Hans to a concert—could he ever forget it!—saying that it would be good for him. There was a great player playing the violin; somehow they squeezed in, the man at the door let them in for half-price; but half-price was a lot, even then. Broido said nothing all the time; Hans never knew what *he* had said—he was in the seventh heaven. For a long while after the concert he could not play his mouth-organ.

Broido bought him cigarettes, he bought him sweets; not often, but sometimes; and wouldn't let him say thank you, hardly, wouldn't let him talk about it. On fine nights they would go for a walk, slowly walking up and down and along back streets that Broido knew; on wet nights they would go to the café, or stay at home. He supposed Broido stayed at home. At the Becks' he had often gone to bed, on

wet nights, when supper was over; he would then have the bedroom to himself, the boys were almost always out, wet or fine.

One day a man said something to him in the workshop about Broido. No, said Hans. He was very angry. Well, you better be careful, said the man.

He ain't that sort, said Hans.

Cigarettes and sweets? said the man. That's the way they always makes up to youngsters; that's the way they likes to begin.

But not Bro; Bro was O.K. He didn't argue with the man. There were men like that, but not Bro.

And mostly they were stiffs, not their sort; they talked different, they had more school, set themselves up for class—what was class?—and anyhow there was something slimy about them. He didn't hold with that sort of thing. Nor Broido. Broido said to him one day, Hans, he said, I hear some of them girls in the café say that you're a pretty boy, regular cupid says one of them, so sweet and innocent—he was only eighteen then but was more boylike, it seems, than most eighteens—and Broido had said, just like the man in the workshop, well, you be careful. Broido said, well, you got to know. So he told him, saying, and if any of these stiffs come monkeying around, you tell me.

And later on Broido told him about women. He knew a bit, but not much; how could he know? So Broido told him, teaching him, warning him, but then saying, Oh, hell, women are all right; they'll look after you; they'll teach you. But there was a bitter sound under his words, and only in time did Hans learn that the soul of Broido was eaten up with bitterness because he was blind and couldn't see these girls, these women who let him make a sort of love to them, he could only love them with his hands, the caress, not with his eyes. And having known once the beauty that comes in at the eye, Hans knew that the parson called it the lust of the eye, Broido having known this in his youth, when though near-sighted he could at least see, he longed always for this beauty that he could not have and the longing turned to bitterness, a sort of hate. For sooner or later Broido, he said, always came to hate any woman with whom he had had anything to do, besides a general sort of hate for them all. Yet he couldn't keep away from them.

So he knew from this that Broido was not the sort the man in the workshop said he was. He was O.K., he was a man all right. Not a softy. Yet always kind to Hans, kind to others, too; fetching Hans from the Becks' in Fort Street, and later from Ma Roos's in

De Lorentz Street where he had to climb the hill, but calling also for Meiring and poor old Richards. He needn't do it, but he did. Come on, he said, you old bastards, we got to go and cane some blasted chairs. Poor bloody blind men, we got to go and make baskets.

The four of them were walking along the road; they were walking in the road not on the pavement, they knew the road was wide, and they always walked there, everybody knew they did, going to the workshop, because the pavements were narrow. They were arm-in-arm as usual, the four of them interlocked, he and Broido in the middle, with Richards next to him and Meiring the other side of Bro. They were walking along, going towards the workshop, and they were on the right-hand side of the road facing the on-coming traffic; everybody knew them, the bus-drivers, the lorries, the carts, they did this every morning, always at the same time; minding their steps, as it were, they kept on, feeling the ground attentively with every footfall yet not going slowly, but walking of course rather stiffly, four in a row makes you walk stiffly; they were in step. In the midst of the ordinary noises there were shouts, shouts everywhere, Look out! Look out! and a screech of brakes being applied. Broido said quietly, Wag-'n-bietjie. They stopped,

they waited, not moving an inch; there seemed to be something very close to them. Broido said, I think it's a big lorry. They could feel the heat of the radiator; it was indeed nearly touching them, but it had pulled up in time. People gathered round. The four blind men stood in a row, interlocked, and the lorry facing them, a few more inches and it would have knocked them down, all four of them.

Couldn't you see 'em? Someone said to the driver. Couldn't they 'ear me 'oot? said the driver.

Them chaps is blind, said a voice.

Oh, said the driver. Well, 'ow was I ter know? 'Oo lets 'em walk in the road?

More room in the road, mate, said Broido. Four bloody blind men can't walk all in a row on the pavements. Ain't the road wide enough for yer?

Oh, 'ell, said the driver, under his breath. How could he argue with a chap that was blind?

And it came to Hans that the more the driver seemed to be in the right the more also he seemed to be in the wrong.

Someone said that the driver—it was a big railway lorry, loaded with bales of wool—was new to the road. The driver said no more; he backed his monster and pulled round, and the four men, as soon as Broido said O.K., marched on stiffly to their work.

Someone came presently and told the superintendent, and the superintendent said that they must walk on the pavement, not in the road; couldn't they walk two and two?

But they went on walking in the road, all four arm-in-arm. They said they didn't care. Broido said once to Hans that he didn't care a damn, he wouldn't care a damn if suddenly he was blotted out. Hans didn't understand that. It seemed to him that he and Meiring, and even Richards, did care; they had no wish to be blotted out; but they didn't think about it, they had no nerves, they relied with such confidence on Broido.

Nobody understood Broido. He was kind, but he wouldn't let anybody say so. He had a bitter tongue. He laughed at morals, said it was all bunk, but, said Hans, he looked after me, at least, in a way he did, said morals wasn't so much what you did, but the way you did things. Yet in his mind there was a sort of despair, sometimes a sort of blackness worse than blindness. Then he could be cruel.

For what else was it, that taking him down to the sea, of which he had so marked a fear? Broido said, Oh, come on; you got to learn. They had gone together, but soon they had come away. Several times they did this, finding their way—though of course

Broido knew—across the railway line and in and out past galvanised-iron fences behind which were store-houses, and so to the low sand-dunes and the soft sand. Hans didn't like it. He said he had no use for the sea. The wind always blew, and the sea itself made always a loud noise which there was no stopping. True, it seemed a long way off across the sands, but how could you tell what it might not do?

Then one day, it was a holiday or else a Sunday, one summer when after days and days of heat there seemed every likelihood of a storm, there was a heaviness in the air, but he heard people, the Becks, saying, There's sure to be a storm, there's thunder about; well, that day Broido came for him, saying, Let's go out, let's go for a walk; it's like a bloody oven in the house.

So they had gone out, for if there was a storm they could take shelter, anyone would give it them, and thunder had no terrors for them, as thunder; when their faces were turned to the right quarter of the sky they could tell that the lightning was there and hear afterwards the thunder. But they had no fear of it, though often they had heard, from people reading to them out of the newspaper, of cattle, of human beings, natives and even farmers themselves being

struck by lightning up-country. It seemed this did not happen on the coast.

Well, there was as yet neither thunder nor lightning; only a heaviness in the air, a sense of complete stillness; this was intensified by the absence also of all other ordinary noises in the back streets they were in, because it was either Sunday or a holiday and people were indoors, doubtless also in expectation of a storm.

Where are we going? said Hans.

Oh, anywhere, said Broido. But he was leading Hans gradually to the sea. He went a different way. He said, Play us a tune, so we can keep in step to it. It was an order, a command. Hans played, thinking, Bro's got the pip. Poor old boy. Without knowing anything about it, he seemed to understand, he knew in a sense what it must be like to Broido, to want so much and to have so little, to be blind, to be cut off. It was bad, he said, to be blind, but it was worse for Broido to be blind. He played easy tunes on his mouth-organ and they kept in step, mostly, only sometimes there were obstacles; but Broido had hold of his arm, the tap of the stick which Broido had in his other hand also kept time. Thus it was that the direction of their walk escaped his notice, until his feet felt the loose sand and he became aware that in front of

him there was nothing, no buildings, only what he felt to be immensity. And in his ears, the moment he stopped playing, the loud roar of the sea.

No, he said, I don't want to be here. Let's go.

Well, you can go, said Broido roughly; I like it.

You know I can't go, said Hans.

Don't be a fool, then. Sit down. Let's sit down and talk about it. What are you afraid of?

Hans didn't know.

Listen. You can be afraid. You can go on being afraid. No one can help that. The bravest people have often been afraid. I ain't afraid of the sea, but I am afraid of them cars, them lorries and things. That's why I walk in the road. To show 'em. Now you got to show the sea. Sit down.

Hans sat down. He didn't like it. In the still air, for even on the edge of the sea there was only a faint breath stirring, the noise of the breakers was terrific, it was a steady roar, yet with a definite beat. Why is the sea so loud? he said.

Broido said that the fishermen had told him that the breakers were caused partly by the tides but partly also by something they called the swell. A big swell was a sign of heavy weather, a storm, miles and miles out to sea. The fishermen had offered to take him out in their boat, but he had refused.

Why? You should 'a gone, being so fond of the sea.

Broido was silent. I'm going in the boat some day, he said.

Hans wondered whether perhaps he was, after all, afraid of the sea, and only came to the seashore, just to show the sea, show it that he wasn't going to be afraid. Hans felt that he would rather die, himself, than go out in a boat. Nothing could be worse than to be blind and go on the sea in a boat. And thinking that Broido wasn't perhaps so very different from himself he began to feel less afraid of being there on the very sands where, as he supposed, the water could come up.

But it was, he said, an outside feeling, it didn't last; deep inside him he had still this nameless terror, of something so much bigger than himself, so uncontrollable, and not human.

He was restless, Let's go, he said.

Gawd, can't you sit still for ten minutes?

Well, he couldn't do anything; he would have to sit still; if he moved, got up and walked away, he would soon lose himself on the sands, find that he was perhaps down almost by the water, the water would pull him in, he would shout and shout and no one would come. Broido would not hear his shouts in the roar of the immense breakers. He sat, close to Broido,

fingering the loose sand, pushing his hands in and drawing them out again.

Here, have a fag, said Broido, lighting one and giving it to him, then lighting another.

How far is it from here to the water? said Hans.

Miles, said Broido, couple o' hundred yards at least; widest part of the beach here, the fishermen say, highest tide never reaches where we are.

A hot breath of air came off the sands, and in the stillness they heard a far distant rumbling.

Ah, thunder, said Broido.

Let's go, said Hans, we don't want to be caught.

Broido laughed. Bloomin' kid, he said. Well, come on. Their feet sank in the soft sand, it was difficult walking, to Hans it seemed that the treacherous soft dry sand was hindering them, trying to keep them back. He remembered the immense relief with which he felt hard ground under his feet, the relief when at last they crossed the railway line....

That was Broido. What could you do with a fellow like that? You couldn't do anything. And it didn't matter. It could not be explained, yet Hans knew that he understood. Yes, Broido was his friend; there wasn't the slightest doubt of it. For five years they had stuck to each other; the five years in which he

had grown up, become a man; and what he was, what he had, he owed to Broido. What was it that he gave to Broido that made Broido stick to him? He didn't know, he couldn't tell. Only his devotion, yes, his love.

He could think it, he couldn't say it, not to Broido, not to anyone; you couldn't talk about things like that, but Broido knew, and he knew. It was different talking to women, to girls; you used a different language, they understood a different language. That too came from Broido. All the hum and bustle of the café was about him, the noise of the wireless when there was music, and when there was something else on the wireless they put records on the gramophone; at the Pompadour it was music all the time. He got to know Magdalena—as far as she could be known—he wondered if it was true about the Greek? Magdalena's shout, and that strange inhuman noise that was the Greek's voice. Broido talked to lots of girls from the factories in that part of the town; so did he. He was shy, but he could see—see? Well, it was something different from, understand—that they were great favourites with the girls. Something in being blind. Lots of petting and being made a fuss of, nicely. But only in the café, only in public. He never tried for more; he didn't try for that. He thought Broido did. But

he wasn't sure, not absolutely sure. Sometimes he was quite sure, but Broido never said, so he wasn't sure. Broido joked and pretended, made up stories, said, Oh, yes, of course; but the reality wasn't there, you couldn't get hold of anything, you didn't know. Broido was always a bit of a mystery to them all. Though not always. He found later that Broido hated women, but that women were mad about Broido. Yes, mad. That sort of madness. So Broido gave them what they wanted. God, how he used to laugh and call them bloody fools! He was strong, immensely strong. A woman wouldn't have a chance. Well, they didn't want to escape; it was Broido wanted to escape; he could only escape one way.

Broido always said to him, You keep quiet. You're a kid. I'm looking after you.

And then one day Broido said to him, in his rough jovial way, a little harshly, Come on, let's go and see a few girls.

At the café, Bro?

No, not at the café. You come on. I'm taking you. You got to learn sometime.

No, said Hans, I'm not coming.

He wasn't afraid. He just didn't like the idea. It might be all right, but then again it mightn't.

Broido said, You're too bloody innocent. You want

taking down a peg. Didn't know you was goin' to be afraid of women.

Hans said nothing. No, he wasn't going; not now. Deep in his secret mind he wondered whether one day he might. But he wouldn't now.

Broido didn't understand. Come on, he said, persuading, why should we be left out just because we're blind? And where's the harm, anyway? Ain't it natural?

But Hans wouldn't budge. He had heard of this house. It strangely excited him, yet repelled him. Leave me out, Bro, he said; you go.

What, me? Broido shouted; why should I go? I don't have to go. I was only taking you.

There was a pause. Hans thought, Oh, Bro doesn't have to go, of course. Must have a girl of his own.

And for awhile he was jealous, not so much of the girl (he only imagined her) as of Broido for having a girl and not telling him.

He was older when he found out more about the actual relationships between Broido and women. Hadn't he found that Mina had at one time been mad about him? Yet Broido hadn't cared two pins for Mina. All he wanted was the excitement of women, the triumph, the revenge.

He would never have gone to Ma Roos but for Broido. He would never have done anything. That was what it was to have a friend. The feeling of what it was to have Broido for a friend came welling up in his heart, and again Broido seemed to be there beside him, it was almost as though any moment he might feel a hand on his shoulder, and the rough voice, with the undertones of kindness that were for him, would be saying, Oh, come on. Let's go out. Come on.

Bro, he said——

And instantly, with the words, he was alone. Of course. If only he knew the time! He was cold and stiff. His feet were stone cold, resting on the cell-floor. Broido wasn't there, he would never come.

Because——

He got off the bed and straightened himself up. He stood for a moment thinking, but so deeply that he had no words. Nor pictures. But only senses. The sense of loss, the sense of fear. Panic. Broido dead. They would say that he had done it. Christ! anything may happen, anything. Being blind wouldn't stop it happening. They did it to women sometimes. Poisoning was awful; poisoning was a woman's weapon; what else could a woman do? They didn't let poisoners off because they were women. Would they,

then, let him off because he was blind? They wouldn't, they wouldn't. The Court was cold, inhuman, it was a law-court, it had no sympathy with any human being. Why with him? The judge would administer the law; he knew what the law was which the judge would administer. He is in prison half way through his trial, a man accused of murder—of murdering his friend....

Perhaps he was crazy, crazy then and crazy now, crazy all the time, he said, restless, dirty, dishevelled, a young man, blind and feeling his way slowly about the prison cell in which there was nothing but a pallet-bed by the wall, and a shut door. He stood by the door for a long time, his fingers plucking at the bars of the narrow grating in the door. A grating, so that they could see in. Yes, so that they could see. How many more hours had he got to live through before they took him back to the Courthouse? He could scarcely stand: he thought he was going to fall. Yet he got round to the place where the bed was. Would it ever be morning? Would it ever be day?

Nothing, it seemed, would stop that engine that was his mind, nothing he could do, it was like the engine of a motor-bike, going, not evenly but loudly, persistently. Was this incoherent thinking worse than when it was coherent? Well, he couldn't do anything.

Ideas raced into his head—from where?—flinging about the ideas already there, but not flinging them out, not getting rid of them; then more ideas rushed in. He was talking to Mina and they were in the Park, they went often to the Park, after that, and playing together under the trees in an out-of-the-way corner, she said it was all right the keeper wasn't there, she said, Oh, you're not so strong as Broido. And as she said it he thought how strange it was she should be talking like Sophie, but then of course it was Sophie in her stiff thick cotton nightgown, yet not Sophie but some stiff cane they had given him at the workshop for a set of chairs that were to be done with cane thicker than usual, he said to Broido, This blasted stiff cane cuts yer fingers. Then don't do it, said Broido, they can't make yer. Richards said, Well, if Hans don't do his share, someone else will have to, and Meiring said, Yes, we shall have to. But Miss Gray suddenly appearing said, I'm going to read to you this afternoon, but I've got a cold, my voice is a bit weak, so you mustn't make too much noise with those baskets. It's a terrible thing that people should do these things, she said, these awful crimes; really I don't know how they can, as though it wasn't bad enough being blind, without one blind man killing another; at least they say he did. Oh, said Hans, doctor

said that one of them wasn't blind, not absolutely blind. Mr. Pons said that that would have no bearing on the case, the whole case hinged on the iron bar. The superintendent said there was no iron bar in the workshop. Christ! said Broido, Christ! The judge said the prisoner could have a chair. Ma Roos got up and said, Well, come to that if there wasn't no chair the prisoner could sit on her knee; the judge could too. But the judge said he didn't like treacle, not that sort of treacle. Mr. Stanley said that he would like to have a word with Ma Roos in private, but the man in the police-van said, No, there wasn't time, they mustn't keep the judge waiting. You can hand me up her name on a piece of paper, said the judge. Pieces of paper flying about the court like cocks and hens, they said. Magdalena said, Yes, there was blood on his bloody coat, but even if he did it he's a marvellous musician. The Greek said he didn't like music. The warder said he knew all the blind men, he always counted them over before he put them away for the night, in the kitchen cupboard, he was certain he couldn't have missed one. The man with the voice like the short sharp but not angry bark of a dog said that the only thing missing was the corpse. Oh, no, said Broido, you're wrong, and anyway I hit him first. Where are you speaking from? said the judge.

Over the telephone, said Broido; there's one here. The prisoner said he would like to stand up, he thought it would soon be high tide. Mina Roos said that Bernardus had a nice face. Stephanie said that the prisoner had a nice face. Stephanie....

CHAPTER VIII

Must have dropped off again for an hour or two. Getting off the bed and feeling his way, fingers to the cell wall, feeling his way to the wall where the window was, high up, he couldn't touch it, but he knew the window was there, he put his head back, turning his face up to the window, to the light. Yes! It was light, it must be day. His sightless eyes had, they could still have, the sensation of light. Must have dropped off for an hour. And now? And now back to the pallet-bed where his coat was, his shoes, he felt the frowsy discomfort of his slept-in clothes. Take 'em all off. Taking them all off he stood there naked, a naked prisoner in a prison cell, yet, as his hands told him, his hands passing over, feeling the flexible muscles, the smooth skin, at the same time a young, strong man. How strong he would be if he could run, if he could exercise; it was a runner he would like to be, best; he listened always when people talked about athletics, running, the Marathon. He stretched out his arms; then stiffening his whole body he stood erect, tense, on the tips of his toes. Erect.

Must have dropped off. Felt better now. He would give anything for a clean shirt. But there wasn't one. And once more dressed, with his shirt now properly tucked into his trousers, socks and shoes on—he would put his coat on later—he stood again by the window, head thrown back, seeking the thin stream of light with his face up, eagerly.

It was a new day. He had lived through yesterday, through the terrible experience of the Courthouse; he had lived through the night; to-day could be no worse. Resting the palms of his hands on the wall in front of him, he kept his face up to the light. He felt neither hunger nor thirst; it seemed to him now that he felt nothing, not even fear; he had lived and relived everything that he could, the Courthouse, Broido, to the point of exhaustion; the past was over, the future hadn't come; could it be that it was possible to forget everything, to live only in the present moment? Queer, he said, but it might be. If I don't think of anything. Still straining upwards to the daylight coming through the high barred window. Bars, they had told him, bars and a locked door on a blind man. Bitterly. It wasn't possible not to think. Not when that was the only thing you could do. Nothing to do. Nothing to listen to, no talking, no one to talk to—that also a kind of thinking—nothing even to do

with one's hands. He could understand how men, left alone in cells with nothing to do, nothing for hours and hours and hours, interminable hours, would do terrible things to themselves, terrible things. Forced on them by their loneliness, their boredom, the frightful silence.

God, what did men do when they were locked up for years! Thinking again. Would he be locked up for years? Well, he wouldn't stand it; he would knock his brains out. Or live in the minute? One couldn't go on living in the minute, not in prison, where there was no present, only a bloody past, and a future, a future that drove you mad because it never came. Yet it must come. Of course it must. Leaving the window, the wall where the window was, he went back to the bed—that was the cell, a man's habitation for years and years, four walls, a barred window, a locked door and a pallet to sleep on—and sitting again on the hard bed, he waited.

He waited for the warder, to be allowed to go out, and for breakfast, and for the men with the police-van to come for him again. It happened yesterday, it would all go on happening over and over again. He or another. Another? No, there was only himself; it could never happen, like that, to anybody else. Nor, in a sense, was it happening to him; he didn't exist,

his body had ceased to exist, only a disembodied spirit remained which was, for some reason, in a state of nervousness for which he had no words. Feelings haven't words. Words and feelings, mixed up, were always chasing around in his mind. He couldn't stop thinking, yet it wasn't thinking; he was nervous; all he had was an awareness of fear. Fear was at the end of all his thoughts, everything else had dropped away, all pretences, all hopes. I can't face it, he said, I can't face it. Yet a minute or two ago he wasn't afraid.

Striking up, out of the morass of fear, of terror that was now his mind, came a word. It came with all the force of an external sound. Even as it came, this word Stephanie, he knew that it had come, well, in time, barely in time. Going off his rocker, he said. And couldn't do anything. And all the time Stephanie existed; she was out there, in the town, in the crowd, going on with her life, talking, laughing, was she thinking of him? Why didn't they want to bring her into the case? So that he shouldn't know whether or no Broido was right? She would have to swear. Perhaps she couldn't. God, it was easy for a girl to deceive you. And when you were blind? Well, she hadn't; Broido had told lies; how could he believe such a thing about Stephanie? Stephanie was all right. All of them home to De Lorentz Street after the café,

Stephanie between him and Broido, Mina and Bernardus in front. He would have to tell Bro not to make that sort of joke. Ma was a wonder; always had a bit of cake somewhere. Bernardus had a good job, steward on the trains; well, Mina was lucky; he would have liked a job on the trains—only he couldn't see—but anyway the sense of moving, of moving along, not this eternal sitting, sitting. But he wouldn't budge if it meant losing Stephanie. Sitting there he scarcely heard what anyone said, he was listening for her, for the slightest sound, the slightest word, even her breathing. The sound of her voice was different from anything, any voice, any music, that he had ever heard in all his life before. He knew, from the first moment, that it was all up with him.

That night was the beginning. Mina didn't mind, she had Bernardus; she had given him up, oh so easily, wasn't it? And Sophie, well, Sophie was a clod, a poor dumb female animal, almost dumb, he didn't know what to do about her, didn't want to be unkind, but for him Stephanie was the world. He could hardly sleep; he couldn't see her, had scarcely touched her, but the sound of her voice, an unbelievable music, was in his ears all night. In his ears, his most vital sense, his quick, alert, vital, always testing, sense of hearing. Awful to be deaf. Not to be able to hear

Stephanie's voice? Awful, it must be, to be deaf and dumb. Thank God! he wasn't deaf, though for a bit, with her, he was stupidly dumb; he couldn't help it; what a clod she must have thought him; like Sophie. But it soon eased up. Her doing, of course. The only thing she didn't do was to ask him to play his music; it was a long time before he understood; she liked music, loved it, but he found out that she couldn't stick the mouth-organ. Well, that didn't matter; he didn't mind; the mouth-organ pleased him, but music, real music, pleased them both. Mina said, Stephanie don't like the mouth-organ; and he hadn't understood. One day Stephanie said—it was a Saturday night and she and Bernardus were at Ma's, and Mina and a few more, but not Bro—she said, and it was music itself, Mouth-organ? Well, I dunno. Look here, Ma, she said, can I take Hans out on Sunday night, to the organ recital? She spoke as though he was a kid. Every Sunday night an organ recital in the Town Hall, and Hans had never been. No one had told him of it, no one had thought of taking him. Broido had taken him to hear the famous musician. Otherwise the café, the wireless (some good music on that), the gramophone, jazz-bands and fox-trots, crooning.

So off they went. It was heaven. They went by tram. He was out alone for the first time with Stephanie. A

nice girl, holding his arm, guiding him, looking after him. Oh, hell! He didn't want to be looked after. The surge, the urge in him was to look after her; and he couldn't. He forgot this, listening to the organ; not his ears, but the whole vast Hall was filled with the sound. He was almost drunk with it. And Stephanie beside him, whispering to him in a whisper no less musical than the soft scarcely heard notes of the organ, telling him about everything. There was an eagerness in her that matched with his; she seemed to want to tell him as badly as he wanted to learn; at the very beginning she made him see things. The organ. Yes. It was immense. Long pipes towering up and up. She took his two hands and her two hands and out of them made an organ for him, the twenty fingers were the pipes, only there were lots and lots more, some long some short, some thin some fat; the highest notes in the little short thin ones and lowest deepest notes, almost like thunder, in the highest longest pipes of all. So in his mind, ever after that, right up to now, he had an organ.

Going home, going up De Lorentz Street after leaving the tram, Stephanie, he said, I don't know what to say, but you've made me see an organ. Oh, Hans, she said, have I really? and he thought there was a tiny break in her voice as though she might cry. But she

wasn't crying; she laughed instead, saying, Well, perhaps I'll be able to make you see a lot more. And if you liked the music, we'll go again.

It was some time before he actually told Broido that he was going out with Stephanie.

Broido laughed. O.K., boy, he said; keep it up; while the going's good.

He thought, somehow, that Broido knew already. When he told Broido that Stephanie had taken him to hear organ music, Broido said, shortly, Well, why shouldn't she?

Ma Roos said to him one day, Don't you get into no trouble with that girl, Hans. It was the first time he had ever wanted to hit back at Ma. Mind, she went on, she can come here as much as she likes.

Hans said nothing. They couldn't always stick in the house. Sometimes Mina and Bernardus and he and Stephanie would go out together. But they didn't stay together, not for longer than to arrange to meet somewhere, at the foot of the street, so Mina could bring him home and Stephanie could go off home with Bernardus. And soon they didn't even bother about that. Mina said, Well, if Steph can't look after herself by now....

It was a funny thing that he never went to where Stephanie lived, didn't know where she lived; lived

on her own, they said, had a room somewhere, looked after herself. For a long time he wondered what she did. One day he asked her. For a second the sweetness went out of her voice. Oh, never mind, she said; what do you want to know for? But the sweetness came back; she laughed and said, Well, only odd jobs just now; but I don't have to starve.

Hans was content. What did it matter to him what she did? What did distress him was having no money himself. All very well going out with a girl, and letting her pay; he didn't like it; yes, he knew he was blind, dependent, that made no difference; he felt it wasn't the thing to do. He was growing up, coming on; well, he wasn't a boy, he said.

And he had to put up with it, because he had to have her, he couldn't not go out with her; life now would not be worth living if he couldn't hear her voice; he and she couldn't sit in the house every evening at Ma's. Not that it was every evening. Sometimes a whole week would go by, but the week-end would come, and she never broke her promise, about coming and taking him out Saturday afternoon—or on the Sunday.

He asked Broido to lend him a couple o' bob. He had thought about it all day, and now that he had Broido to himself, going up De Lorentz Street, Broido

taking him home after dropping the other men, he asked him.

Couple o' bob? said Broido. What for?

He didn't want to say. Broido knew he went out with Stephanie, but somehow Hans never wanted to talk about it. He said, Oh, well, you know.

Oh, I know, do I? said Broido. Blowed if I do. Well, don't spend it all at once.

He gave Hans half a crown, with a laugh. Hans knew that he knew. Why did the laugh make him feel uncomfortable? He had to have the money.

He had to have it, but she wouldn't let him spend it, not on her. You got to come out with me, she said. The liquid sounds were enough to turn his head. But, Stephanie, he said, you can't always be payin', and anyway— Oh, come on, she said, laughing, we shall miss the tram; you don't have to be so old-fashioned.

And in the tram she said, in the lowest sweetest voice, Hans, she said, you just got to let me. Won't you? I *like* it. If it was yours you'd give it me? Yes. Well, it makes me happy, the same way, bein' able to do something for you. What's the good, else?

He couldn't say anything. He had a nasty choking feeling in his throat. He wanted to hold Stephanie's

hand, and say nothing. He was a poor dumb animal, being looked after.

They got out of the tram at Queen's Corner. Everything was at Queen's Corner. That's the Town Hall, Stephanie said, where we went that Sunday, and the library is where we're standin' and down there is the big Docks. Oh, Hans, I wish I could make you see the Docks!—and now I'm goin' to take you up to where the lighthouse is.

A short steep hill it was, and then steps, oh, lots of steps. It was, he knew, a sunny afternoon, he could tell that by the warmth, also the sun was on his face. Coo, it's a climb, said Stephanie, I must get my breath. Patiently he waited. Then they went on. They were arm-in-arm, interlocked, so that he shouldn't stumble; the steps were difficult, not like stairs, broader, you couldn't take them, not all of them, a step at a time; she had to tell him what the different steps were like as they came to them. Not easy for her. The exercise, the attention she gave him, made her hot. Her voice was sweet, he said, but the very smell of her was sweet. Not like those others. Hans, he said, you'll be losing your head.

Presently they were at the top. Here's a seat, she said, and there's nobody on it. It's in the shade. I shan't be sorry to sit down.

They sat down. The shade was almost chill after the hot sun. There was a breeze now blowing in their faces; he knew the direction of winds; this was coming off the sea. He felt along the seat, a few inches, till he touched her skirt; she put a cool hand on his, gently, without pressure. That was enough; that was a sort of bliss, if not bliss itself.

She was telling him soon about this hill-top, this green Reserve where the lighthouse was; at least, she said, it's not green now, it's brown and burnt after the summer, and on it there's the lighthouse, Hans——

Tell me, he said, about the lighthouse.

A tall white thing, she said, like a huge fat chimney, with a big round glass window on top, oh, and a lid on top of that.

But he couldn't see it because he didn't properly know what a chimney was like. Window, yes, and lid, yes, but how to make out in his mind about the chimney?

Well, she said, it's a sort of tube, ever so big.

Is it? he said, dubiously; he couldn't somehow get it.

Come, she said, taking his hand, I'll show you.

And going to the lighthouse she made him feel the curving walls, and feel also the wall as high as he

could, and, There you are, she said, it's ever so high, and all hollow inside, and at the top a huge light which the sailors can see miles out in the Bay.

She told him that the hill they were on was like a ball on the top of which they were standing, but the ball sloped only in front of them and to the sides, not behind them; and below the slope of this ball there was the town, with all its business buildings and shops and bioscopes and the Town Hall and everything, but they were so high up, standing beside the lighthouse, that she was looking on to the roofs, even of the Town Hall, and seeing the Docks, like looking down from the air, and outside the Docks, she said, there is the lovely sea, all blue like the sky.

Hans said, Yes, he knew what the sky was like, he knew the blueness of the sky.

Stephanie was silent. Then, giving his hand a tiny squeeze, she said, Let's sit down for a minute. Her voice had again a break in it, she seemed to be sorry for him, but he didn't feel any need for that, he felt only the need for this music which was in her voice, not a singing music, something *more* than music, he said, it was like being under a spell. There were good spells as well as bad, there was good magic as well as bad. He was content, he was happy with Stephanie,

up there on the top of the hill with the blue sky overhead and the sun shining and all around him a feeling of immense space. What did it matter if he didn't 'see' this town, these Docks, that she told him of? Yet afterwards, thinking it over, he had found that she had given him something, some new shape or sense in his mind of these outward things. She could do this, he said, something which no one else had been able to do, not Broido, not Mina, make him 'see' things, only it wasn't of course seeing; it was a new sort of experiencing. What could she not do? He scarcely dared to breathe when she did so little a thing as to squeeze his hand; he would cut off his arm for her, die if it would do her any good. Well, he needn't pretend to himself that he wasn't already mad for the love of this girl, though no one knew, no one could possibly guess. And he could do nothing about it; she wasn't like Mina, those others; she was a different being, a sort of angel, they would have voices like that in Heaven; she couldn't really care for a cripple like him, of course she was being kind.

They didn't take the tram back, they walked, it was Saturday afternoon and all the shops were shut in High Street, how quiet it was compared with an ordinary day, and on the pavement scarcely anybody. Lightly Stephanie's hand now rested on his arm,

lightly but alive it was, guiding him, warning him of the crossings.

Oh, Hans, she said, stopping, what funny places there are! Things one sees every day, and never notices.

Hans stood and waited.

It's a street, Hans, she said, all of steps, like those big steps on the Reserve, and little houses both sides all the way up. My, ain't it steep! And there's ropes across the street from the top windows—that's where they hang the washing out. And there's signboards sticking out, why, it's like a picture I seen of a street in China. There's a small bioscope, it's a café-bioscope, though I've never been there, and there's a restaurant, oh, yes, it's kosher, and a cobbler's shop and a boarding-house and a laundry, and higher up there's little houses, coloured pink and green, where people live. My, I'd like to live in one of them pink an' green little houses in a street like this. Oh, Hans, she said, I *wish* you could see it!

Well, there were tears in her voice now, and it seemed to him that he must do something about it.

Stephanie, he said, it don't matter, it don't matter.

But, Hans, she began——

No, no, he said, it don't matter. You go on talking. I like to hear.

That was gospel truth. It didn't matter what she saw. He wanted the sound of her voice, the music, the spell.

You just go on talking, Steph; I like to hear; never mind about the seeing.

Well, she said, we'll pretend you know.

Yes, he said, only you've got to be telling me, you've got to be reminding me.

They walked on after that without saying anything. It seemed to him that they were able now to understand each other; better, that is, than before. Something of his nervousness with her was no longer there, and for her, he thought, there was no longer the feeling that she would have to 'look after' him, take care of him; they were more level. She could talk, tell him things, but as she would talk to a man, to an equal, not to a small child.

Never again did he have the feeling, while he was with her, of being a small child. On the other hand, though 'equal,' she had become a little more remote. He didn't mind. The golden voice was there, bridging what little gap their new equality had thus created; if indeed it was a gap, and not simply his realisation, his certainty, of the difference between her and the rest of womankind within his knowledge.

In a little while she was talking away, telling him about the shops they were passing, shops he had never heard of, and the names over the shop windows. A dairy, a baker, a grocer, a butcher, a shoe-shop, a sports shop—oh, what did they sell at a sports shop? Tennis rackets, she told him, he knew nothing about that, had of course heard of it, and fishing rods, yes, long sticks with string and hooks at the end for catching fish, and footballs, he knew those, cricket bats, golf sticks, jerseys and caps and shoes and white drawers, she said, with elastic round the top, oh, yes, he said, running shorts, glad to find something that he in his turn could tell Stephanie. Wanted to be a runner, he said, ever so badly. Why, yes, said Stephanie, it's what you would have been. Then more shops, a barber and tobacconist, an electrical shop, electric stoves, kettles, refrigerators, wireless; a tinsmith's, a garage, a fish-and-chips, yes, his nose told him that; a hospital shop, where they sold things for hospitals, sick people in bed, legs for people that had lost one of their own, a funny shop; and next to that furniture, and a book shop, and ladies' hats, she said, and then a chemist. Yes, he knew the smell of a chemist's. Then a jeweller's: it was only a name to him, meant nothing, except that a jeweller also sold watches and clocks; they stood there a long time,

Stephanie exclaiming, Oh, that's lovely. Oh, wouldn't I like that. He didn't understand. Gold rings, she said, with diamonds and rubies and pearls and sapphires. Bracelets, pearl necklaces. He didn't understand. Never mind, he said. And she couldn't tell him, there was nothing to describe a diamond by, she said, no words but just diamonds. Worth lots and lots of money. They had to leave the jeweller's at last.

It was a long walk from Queen's Corner, but it had never been so short. Stephanie filled all the empty street for him with life; he didn't know what lots of the things were that she described, but at the end he felt that he was beginning to know at last what a street of shops was. He hadn't a picture of it, but he had a sense of it that was new. So too with De Lorentz Street. Fancy, even De Lorentz Street grew in his consciousness to be a something, not a strip of pavement up which he walked with houses, little houses in rows, within touch of his hand, but two pavements—oh, yes, he knew, but hadn't thought of it that way—with a road between, and two rows of houses with all sorts of little differences that Stephanie saw with lively eyes, saw and described to him.

Wonderful. Though more wonderful even than the descriptions, the new sense of things that she was giving him, was her voice. The Kid with the Golden

Voice, he said. Ma singin' Baby. Nothing in the World so Lovely. A hundred tunes and phrases from the wireless and from records came and went in his brain. None was good enough.

Dead and empty were the days when he didn't hear this voice; and on the days when he and Stephanie were together he dreaded the moments of parting, the sudden swift good night. In his bedroom he would hold his head tight in his hands, and wonder what he was going to do. How strange that this intense happiness should bring with it also such miseries. He was blind, but content, never unhappy; people were so good, even the old Becks. What a difference Stephanie had made; this ecstasy of listening to her, being with her, this utter misery of being blind. He couldn't tell a soul, had to bottle it up, keep it from bursting out. The weeks went by. They did things, but they didn't always go out. Sometimes Bernardus and Stephanie came up together to Ma Roos's, but Bernardus and Mina would go out, and Stephanie would stay and talk to him and Ma; Sophie would be in a corner somewhere. What did Sophie think of Stephanie? He never knew. Sophie never said. No, Sophie didn't come in any more; he didn't think anything was the matter, he didn't think she was going to have a kid; he couldn't ask. Well, of course she didn't have one,

or they would have told him, been a bloody row. All *that* looked so different when he had Stephanie, she wasn't that sort. What sort was she? Besides being an angel? An angel to him, taking all this trouble about a fellow that had nothing, no money to spend, and blind at that. Useless. Yet she came. Spent the evening at Ma's, not often, took him out sometimes of an evening, took him out week-ends regular.

Where was that they went once? Lovers' Walks. Took a long time to get there, long tram-ride. Near the sea, too, Stephanie loved the sea, she wasn't afraid. What, Hans, she said, you afraid of the sea? Well, he was, because he couldn't understand it. Oh, you'd be all right, she said, if you could see it.

They were standing on a pavement, holding on, it seemed, to a low concrete wall. This is the esplanade, she said, a high sort of wall we're on, the sea never comes up here. What a noise it makes, he said. But he stayed there with her, he made no movement. He wasn't thinking of safety, or danger; only of Stephanie. She said, There's quite a lot of people bathing; guess I've got a costume as good as any of those down there. Fat people do look awful in the water. Let's have some tea.

He never knew where the money came from that she spent, tram-fares for two—half a crown doesn't last

long, he couldn't go on asking Bro, had to keep the few bob he earned for necessities—teas and cakes for two, not cheap cafés either, sometimes the good old Pompadour but often posh cafés, and she made him eat lots of cakes when she found that he liked them, had a sweet tooth. He couldn't know whether she ate cakes too; sometimes she laughed and said she was slimming—oh, but you ain't fat, Stephanie?—and his ears told him she stopped eating long before he did, just little noises, little silences told him that.

So now they had tea and some cakes at a café, that was, it seemed to him, right on the edge of the sea because it was on the esplanade between the pavement and the sea, Stephanie said, Yes, there's rocks out there, and the café is built out a bit on the rocks. Out of nearly all the windows there's the sea, she said, ever so blue, and the blue sky and there's white gulls in the sky. Blue, White. Yes, he knew it less from memory than from the sounds of the words on her lips. If only he could see the lips that opened to make these lovely living sounds!

Then, Just a minute, Hans, she said, and getting up she went away.

He sat at the table alone, not knowing where she had gone. Just had to sit and wait. He hated it.

Coming back she said, laughing, Saw a friend of mine. Had to go out for a minute.

She didn't say if it was a girl or a man, this friend.

Her voice was a shade different, not so silky, when she said, Come on, kid, let's have a dekko at Lovers' Walks.

Obediently he got up and waited for her to guide him to the door. They crossed one road, it was very wide, and walking along a little way they came to it, Lovers' Walks, oh, all green grass, she said, and flowers and—and lots of things. She told him about the garden that Lovers' Walks was, and about the children that were playing there, and about the flowers. And the softness came back into her voice—really it had scarcely left it, he said—and talking about the flowers she said, Oh, Hans, how *can* I tell you about them? It's all colours and shapes, and they *can't* be described.

Hans said, All right, he didn't mind.

But coming to a flower which she said was a convolvulus she picked one—No one's looking!—and made him feel the delicate soft shape of it under the tips of his fingers, Because it's blue, she said, and it's called Morning Glory, and, feel, isn't the shape of it like a little trumpet? Well, it was, but for a bit he seemed

to have lost interest in flowers—shapes and colours, he knew what blue was and white, he had an idea what red was, hot, yes, but red; it came, this red, sometimes into his mind—he had lost interest in things, objects; true, Stephanie was telling him, he had the sound of her voice and the spell it seemed to cast over him, but he now all at once wanted more than that, he wanted Stephanie, he wanted to get nearer to her, have her come nearer to him. But he couldn't say anything, couldn't say a word of all this that was going on inside him.

Finding a corner on the edge of Lovers' Walks, there's a bit of shade here, she said, they sat on the ground, resting in the shade though the sun wasn't hot, just a pleasant afternoon in April, wasn't it? he could smell the Autumn in the air, the Autumn smells of the little valley blotted out the sea smell. Where I can see the children, she said; he could hear them, kids shouting and playing. Happy, of course.

He lay back, hands behind his head, face upturned to the sky; he wanted to think; he wondered if Stephanie was looking at him, and what she thought about him. There was a movement beside him and he knew—he felt—that she was near him, almost touching, bending over him. No, don't move, Hans, she

whispered—she didn't need to whisper?—I'm only looking at you, having a good look. Not worth it, he said. A little laugh floated over him. Oh, but it is. You don't know what a nice face you've got. Perhaps you'd be vain. An honest face, too. You don't know what that means? No, of course you don't. You don't know what it means to a woman.

She touched his face with her fingers, lightly but at the same time, he thought, caressingly; she had never done so before; he felt her hand going over his features, outlining his face, stroking his cheek. Then she pushed her fingers through his hair; he hoped she would never stop. You're a nice boy, she said, you've got to go on being a nice boy. That voice like bells! And on his face the feel of her breath, warm and sweet and healthy—God, it was like the sweet breath of cows, he said, that he had loved long ago on the farm. And thinking in the soft air under Stephanie's soft breath and the feel of her fingers in his hair, thinking of the farm he must, he said, have gone to sleep, gone off into a doze, for, coming out of it, he heard a stranger saying words to Stephanie that he didn't understand.

You've no need to waste your time, said the man, he judged that her head was turned away from him,

she was near him but not touching him, her voice was above him, she was sitting upright if not actually standing. Can't you go away? she said.

Oh, all right, said the man; but all this seems funny to me.

Funny! said Stephanie. I ain't going to explain; you wouldn't understand.

Don't seem to need an explanation, said the man sarcastically.

Well, you can go away. I said you wouldn't understand.

Oh, well, said the man, you know where to come, I haven't changed.

Then, Girlie, he said, almost whispering, you're prettier than ever.

Go away! she said. Go away! Damn you!

Well, the man must have gone away. He heard no more nor did he know what to make of what he had heard. Stephanie was absolutely silent, absolutely still. He put out a hand feeling over the grass. She was standing, for his hand touched her foot, he almost made his fingers meet round her ankle. And at that she gave a start, he could feel it. Oh, Hans, she said, did you hear? And as he said that he'd heard some fellow talking, she went on hurriedly, yes, you'd think in a place like this men'd leave you alone. Seems

some men can't leave you alone anywhere; always on the prowl.

He said nothing, working it out in his mind as to whether it was as she said, or what it was.

Well, she said, no harm done. The sweet voice was even again, lapping round him like waves of music. Come on, chum, she said, we better be going. Oh, look at your hair! and plumping down on her knees beside him she got a comb from her bag and combed his hair, laughing as she did so, and put his hat on. Jumping to her feet she took both his hands and pulled him up saying, Heave-ho!

On the way home in the tram, after a silence, she came back to the subject. Did you think I knew 'im? she said.

Seemed like it, said Hans; seemed like he knew you.

Stephanie laughed, Oh, you innocent! That's the way they all go, begin by pretendin' they know you.

Hans said nothing. The words that went on ringing in his head were, Prettier than ever! He had no standards, how could he have? What were looks when a face was but a dim recollection, at the best? Yet how wonderful to think that Stephanie was beautiful! He would never know what she looked like, but he now knew that she was beautiful. And always there

was her voice to enchant him, to put spells on him.

Hell! he said, What did it matter what she was!

Oh, but it did matter, for of course she was all right, that chap in Lovers' Walks was just one of these cads, these fellows that go round speaking to girls; funny sort of business. Fellows with plenty of money coming out and picking up decent working girls, giving them things, oh, yes, he knew. Broido used to say, Well, the nobs get away with it all right, blast 'em!

Well, said Ma Roos, been enjoyin' yourselves, you two?

Yes, we been to Lovers' Walks, said Stephanie. She said nothing about the man.

Stephanie stayed, and they had supper—Mina wasn't there—he and Stephanie and Ma Roos and poor Sophie. Ma was jolly—when wasn't she?—but Stephanie said little; Sophie merely made a noise eating. He was growing; he had the feeling, at supper, not of being the child, the helpless blind, but of being the man in the house, the man with his women, he was the man and they looked up to him. And so short a time ago he had, for all his years, been little more than a kid.

Look here, said Ma, you two love-birds, I'm goin' out for a bit.

O.K., said Stephanie, enjoy yourself.

Ma laughed so heartily at the way Stephanie said this that she had to get up and go and get a drink of water.

That evening Stephanie read some stories out of a magazine. It was the first time, he said, she ever done that; or anybody. It was nearly always the newspaper, at the workshop, or something religious. The Bible they liked, but some of the religious things they had to listen to, well, under their breath they used to sort of hum, Oh, my eye, ain't it pi! Broido always started this. But they never said it to the Bible. Why, the Bible was as full of stories as the newspaper. And now the magazine that Stephanie was reading, stories about people, gave their names and all, even had the exact words they said to each other, lots of private things, he could listen for ever. Stephanie read on, now there was a new quality in her voice, she, too, was eager to know, eager to read on, they were both in another world, yet here at the same time was Stephanie beside him, he was sitting at the table, and so was she.

He sat there, his elbows on the table, his head in his hands listening to the golden voice, and the golden voice was there beside him at his ear. He could hear Sophie breathing loudly in her corner.

He supposed she, too, was listening. They paid no more attention to her, but no less, than if she had been a cat or a dog.

Well, there was a murder story, and after that a story about cowboys in America, one about a ship at sea in which a chap goes mad and gets down with a revolver and a crowbar into the works, the engines, then a bit of poetry, and a long love-story which, said Stephanie, went on and on, it was really a book, and this in the magazine was one of the chapters like. Well, it was good; it did tell you—didn't it?—what people felt like. The man couldn't help it, after being all bunged up he said suddenly to the girl, I love you, and of course she just looked at him, a long slow serious look, it said, from under her dark lashes.

Somehow, without knowing it, his hand had crept across the table and met Stephanie's, and they held hands quietly all the rest of the time that she went on reading. And afterwards he didn't want to talk. He thought about the story. Would he ever be able to say that to Stephanie?

He seemed, these months, to live only in Stephanie and the hours she gave him, yet all the time he was going to the workshop the same as usual, much the same as usual, he said, he and Broido and Meiring

and Richards, four bloody blind men, said Broido, all in a row. Yet not so bloody, said Hans, wasn't his heart full to the brim? Stephanie, the girl with the golden voice, coming up, taking him out, reading stories, why, she sometimes sang things, half singing, half saying—but he never got out his music, he never dared to play the mouth-organ, the jew's-harp, but only sometimes, softly to himself, in his bedroom. Of course he wondered sometimes how it would end, but when he thought of it ending at all he felt that if it did he would go mad.

The weeks went by, then all of one week she didn't come, and hadn't said a word about not coming, he could scarcely get through the day, each day, his feet were like lead, his heart didn't seem to beat, he was in despair. He said nothing. This was a loneliness to which mere blindness was nothing. Nothing? God, if he wasn't blind he could go out and find her, get to the bottom of things for himself. He tried to bear it, but he couldn't; he said to Ma one day in the week, Where's Stephanie? Ma Roos said, Oh, didn't she say? Didn't she tell you? She's away; but she'll soon be back. It was a shame not to tell you. Ma Roos patted his shoulder with her large soft hand. She'll be here Sunday, she said.

When she came, her very first words and her lovely

little laugh charmed him out of himself. He didn't care where she had been, now that she had come back. Later on, she let it drop that someone was ill, suddenly, and she had to go. But all that afternoon, he noticed, she was more tender to him than she had ever been, called him sweet names, silly names, and was all the time gay and lively, teasing, full of spirits. Oh, Hans, she said, I like you, I do like you. He felt that this was a sort of cry out of her heart, but a happy cry, not touched with what the story called passion, not an echo, however faint, of the clamour that was going on in his own.

How long would he be able to hold out? He felt like a giant chained down to a rock, like a blinded lion, powerful yet useless. What was the good of going on? It would be better if Stephanie should go away, get married perhaps.... He wondered his mind didn't burst with a thought like that inside it. He knew that he had come a long way when the conviction rushed upon him that he could and would kill any man that should dare to lay hands upon her. She mightn't know it, but she was his; no one else was going to have her. In the night terrific things—struggles, fights, death-grapples—went on in his brain. Yet let the day come, and Stephanie step into the little house with her Who is it, Hans? and he was tamed,

all the dreadful thoughts of last night fled away, he would clap his hands and say, Stephanie!

What was that? The word seemed to burst out from the inside of his head, he heard himself saying Stephanie! not here in the cell where time went on and no one came, but out there, in that timeless life of coming and going, the cafés, the walks, the tram-rides, the suppers at Ma's, the high Autumn winds, the concert at the Sailors' Institute where he had sat with her hand willingly in his and he had said, over and over again, Stephanie! Stephanie! It rang in his brain. And Hans, she had said, Hans.

Yet he remembered the concert. Sailors they were, off all sorts of ships in the Docks, and he had never heard that sort of singing before. It was music, too, but not so much music as a sort of good-fellowship, laughter and fun, boisterous, hearty, and good strong voices singing away, making jokes, telling funny stories and he felt that if this was the sea why should he be afraid of it. Well, he wasn't afraid; Stephanie had taught him. Is your friend blind? someone said to Stephanie. Yes, she said. Oh, I'm sorry, said the man; does he smoke? Here, mate, have a cig? You 'ave one too, Miss. And somehow, before long, he was almost swamped with cigarettes, whole packets shoved into his hands; and sweets, too. Stephanie said, They're

nice chaps, sailors. Hans didn't know what to say. The concert went on. The man whispered, Does 'e like music? 'As 'e got a favourite? Music? said Hans, yes, he liked music, all music; he didn't know that he had a favourite. Hush! said Stephanie, they're going to sing.

In the midst of the friendly audience, listening to the friendly music, he sat entranced; they were like lovers sitting close together, close up to each other, fingers intertwined; what happiness! If the singers were only voices to him, there was Stephanie breathing softly into his ear what they were like, short, tall, thin, fat, red-faced, young, old, bearded, nice, and the people round him were the same, friendly, talking, full of fun, just his sort; it was like being in a huge family, a happy family. He and Stephanie were in the family, but a little apart; as lovers always are. He whispered, Stephanie! and she whispered back, Hans! It *was* love in her voice, in her golden voice, wasn't it? You could tell by the thrill, you felt strange sensations going up and down your spine. Did she feel the same?

And afterwards when she took him home, guiding him along the streets, across the roadways, they were silent. She was practical, taking care of him; one side of him was obedient; but the other side was a lover in

full career, urging, exclaiming, expostulating, persuading, silently in his own mind and almost wordlessly at that.

Going up De Lorentz Street he put his arm round her waist loosely as though round a delicate plant that he was afraid of hurting. She laughed and settled his arm well in round her waist, saying Hans! but taking care his fingers did not stray higher than her waist-belt. Well, he said, he would not have dared.

Yet inside the room he had wondered what might come next. He stood still and waited. Oh, here's a note from Mina, she said, reading it out, Ma and Sophie's gone to bed. Me and Bernardus will be back soon. Well, I wasn't going to wait, said Stephanie, but I may as well.

Hans sat down, he felt with his hands and found a chair and sat down. He hadn't altogether taken in the talk about the note; it wasn't important, didn't matter; he and Stephanie had the place to themselves, that was what he knew. He knew, too, that he was on fire, that he must have Stephanie for his own; reason, whys and wherefores, didn't come into it; he was a young strong man holding out his arms.

Stephanie! he said.

The only answer a low little laugh, water falling

over pebbles, the soft sound came from across the room.

Stephanie, he said again, in a queer strangled voice that he hardly recognised as his own.

Hans, she said gently, I think I won't wait. I'd better be going.

He wanted to jump up and stand between her and the door; what was the use? Only go stumbling over furniture.

You ain't afraid of me, Stephanie? he said.

No answer. A long silence in which he thought he could hear faint movements. Then he was aware of her near him, close to him, and in a minute there she was on his knee, sitting lightly, like a fairy, he said, but it didn't mean anything, she laughed and put an arm around his neck, she stroked his cheek.

How light she was! He hadn't known how light and slim she was, yet his hands told him that she was soft and rounded, though slender, he wasn't free with her but he passed his hands over her shape, learning the lines of her figure through his finger-tips; she sat quite still, not even moving when his hands passed slowly over her breasts; they passed, upwards to her face, the blind man's hands, feeling, learning; he felt the small ears under the soft hair, it was golden, like her voice, she had told him long ago that people said

her hair was the colour of gold, he felt a pointed chin, a mouth that had full lips and turned up at the corners—you tickle, she said, laughing, and in her cheek, near the corner of her mouth there was a dimple. He ran a finger down her face from forehead to chin, the nose was straight; touching her eyes, which she closed, he felt the eyeshapes, the eyelashes. His hand dropped into her lap. What did he know? Nothing. How pretty you are! Prettier than ever! How did the man know that? God, I don't even know what prettiness is! I don't know what she's like, I'd give anything to know. To see her beauty. His very soul longed for beauty. It seemed to him then that seeing was better than hearing. The words burst out of him. Oh, Stephanie, he said, I wish I could see, I wish I could see! It was a cry of anguish. I know, she said gently, my poor Hans, I know. And soothing him, she said that he was perfect, so much better than those that could see, a blind angel, she said, that a woman could trust.

He scarcely took it in. He didn't care about seeing anything else, he wanted to be able to see her—Oh, can't you see, he said, how dreadful it is not to? Oh, Stephanie, he said, I love you.

There was a silence. They both sat quite still, Stephanie on his knee. Their speaking hands were

silent, dead. Then in the street outside a sound of footsteps. Swiftly she took his face now between her hands, suddenly again alive, and kissed him, kissed his eyes and at last his mouth; his arms for a second held her tightly; she broke away easily; he remembered afterwards that even in that ecstasy he hadn't kissed her, not then nor at any time. Mina and Bernardus came in. Mina said, Hallo, you two! Bernardus said, Well, come on, Steph, we better be gettin' home.

When they had gone Mina came over and now she too sat on his knee: she often did that, when Bernardus wasn't there, it was just friendly, like brother and sister, she said, You getting pretty thick with Steph?

Oh, well, he said, he liked her awfully.

Of course, said Mina, that's all right. Only thing is, Bernardus says, well, he says she's not your sort.

To hell with Bernardus! To Mina he said, Not my sort? I don't know what you mean.

Well, just that, Hans. You don't want to get too thick with a girl like that. I mean, only get hurt worse if she throws you over.

But why should she?

Mina was silent. Oh, he knew. After all wasn't he

blind? The golden girl with the golden voice would throw him over.

But would she?

Well, said Mina, getting off his knee, don't say I didn't tell you.

He could find his way now easily from room to room, people that didn't know wouldn't know that he was blind but Mina took his arm, guided him to his room as she had done all those weeks and months ago; she came in and undid his tie, and after that saying good night she kissed him, a cool kiss but suddenly very sweet to him, for it seemed to say that deep down Mina understood. He did so badly need that someone should understand.

The Winter came, and the short days and the chill nights. Some people, they told him, had fires, but they had no fire at Ma's, they were all young and strong and healthy and Ma never felt the cold. Stephanie and he spent more evenings at De Lorentz Street and fewer evenings out; that was all, she brought more magazines to read, and some books. It was a happy peaceful time. He couldn't believe that what Mina had said was true. Yet in his mind there had been sown this tiny seed of doubt.

Yes, the Winter, and, after the Winter, what? There was no after. The Winter itself was the end.

The end of one life—ah, of Broido—but the end also of a life of his own. Now there was nothing. If there was to be another, a new life, he had no interest in it. How could he have an interest, if this was it, the cell, the prison?

The warder could take away the breakfast; he didn't want it. He remembered now that the warder had brought in the breakfast a long time ago when he was thinking of Stephanie. If only Stephanie would be in the Courthouse, if only she would speak to him. How could he tell any story to the Court without telling the Court about Stephanie? For the only thing that had really happened to him in all his life was the coming into it of Stephanie. If they could understand that they would see that whatever else happened, happened necessarily.

Stephanie, he was quite clear, had come in, and Broido had gone out. Couldn't he say that to Mr. Pons? He got up and put on his coat; he touched the breakfast things aimlessly, he would choke if he tried to eat, but touching the cup he raised it carefully and drank off the coffee at a draught, greedily.

With the drinking of the coffee the past went out like something that might have slipped from his hands and fallen noiselessly into some pit, a pit, yes, and he to stand groping on the brink of it, poised in

the present, knowing that his next blind step must be into nothingness. Fear? he said to himself; no, this wasn't fear, this was terror, a something beyond words. What mightn't happen? To-day! He would defend himself, but if they shouldn't believe him?

He sat on the pallet bed, hunched up, the life gone out of him. A numbness fell on him, numbing his limbs, his brain; he couldn't go through much more; let them do what they liked, he would go to Court and say nothing, for he had no strength; let them do what they liked, he said.

CHAPTER IX

He was helped down out of the dock, and into another place. He was now the witness, they said. As long as he was in the dock, Mr. Pons had told him, he must say nothing, nobody had any right to ask him any questions, but it was different in the witness-box; there they both of them, both he and Mr. Stanley, could ask him questions, the judge, too, could ask him things. Mr. Pons said that he mustn't mind the questions Mr. Stanley might ask, he must answer them carefully, yes and no as much as possible; he would find it easy to answer his, Mr. Pons's questions, the answer would be already in the question.

Again the judge said that he had better have a chair, but in the cold authoritative voice there was no indication as to any opinion formed, one way or the other, on the case. In the judge's eyes he was, he felt, still a man being tried for murder.

There was a silence in the court. He sat in the witness-box, not knowing what to do. Besides, the position of the box was different, and he did not

exactly know where everybody was in relation to the box, as he had got to know yesterday where everybody was in relation to the dock. The silence was broken by somebody coming and putting a book in his hand —why a book? he couldn't read—and then making him repeat the words of the oath, as he had heard the real witnesses do. The truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. God's truth! it would take him a long time to tell them that! If indeed he could.

Mr. Stanley is speaking. He says, On the night of the 28th of July a man was found dead at the foot of the stairs leading up to the workshop for the blind. You were with that man, and that man, Broido, was your friend. Will you tell us what you remember of the events of that evening, that fatal night?

My lord, said Hans, turning a little to where he thought the judge was, it was this way. It is true Broido was my friend, a good and true friend he was, until this happened, and why he said what he did say I don't know. But I mustn't come to that yet. I will try to tell you everything. That afternoon we were working, and we didn't quite finish; we were caning chairs, and two were not finished, so Broido and me we agreed to go back after tea and finish. We did this because we were stronger than the others, and because he could find his way about, being not so

blind, not quite, and because we were talking about something we wanted to go on talking about by ourselves. We left the workshop, the four of us, Broido, me, Meiring and Richards at the usual time and we went home to tea; we took Meiring home and old Richards and then Broido took me home to where I lived in De Lorentz Street. He said he would come back for me about seven o'clock. And at about seven o'clock he came back. By then it was beginning to rain, the rain set in and there was a wind blowing the rain in our faces. We got a bit wet going down De Lorentz Street, and at the bottom we took a tram, so what we wanted to talk about we couldn't after all talk about till we got back to the workshop.... No, he didn't know the time; perhaps it would be about half past seven. No, there wasn't anybody else there; nobody at all....

We sat down and began to work on the chairs we had to do, and at the same time we began to talk. No, we went on talking, for this talk of ours had been going on for a long time. For years Broido was my friend, I don't know when he stopped being my friend; I don't think he ever stopped, but something came along and got between us; he didn't understand, perhaps I didn't understand; it would have been all right in time. I have to say something that

perhaps the Court won't like—he paused, no one spoke, so he went on—I have to say that Broido was a man that got all he wanted with women, he always had a girl somewhere, though I didn't know this, not till the last year; I often wondered, but at last I knew. I ain't surprised; there was a lot in him girls would like. And I didn't mind. What was it to me? I didn't mind, I wasn't jealous, I wouldn't go with him once when he asked me to go to a certain house, as long as he was my friend that was all I wanted, that was O.K. He was older than me, he could do as he liked, he knew something about the world and I didn't; I only knew what he taught me. He was rough sometimes, sarcastic, but he wasn't rough with me; he was a sort of father to me; and brother as well, yet not bossy; he was, for all that time, everything to me and I loved him....

No, this love that he had for Broido had never ceased. He knew it was very difficult to explain....

Broido used to fetch me every morning from where I lived, first at the Becks' and then with Ma Roos—his ears caught a faint titter of laughter—and he used to take me home every evening. (Of course he shouldn't have said Ma Roos, he should have said Mrs. Roos, that was what they were laughing at.) He could manage to see a little, but I—I am blind. He it

was who took me to live at Mrs. Roos's house, and I was very happy there, I can't tell you how happy I was, and I owed it to my friend. I have to tell you this, he said, so that you can see how he thought about me, and what I thought about him. How that there wasn't ever anything between us, but only this thing that happened at the end.

It wasn't difficult, after all, this telling the Court all that he remembered about Broido; he had been afraid, but he wasn't afraid now, every scrap of nervousness had left him; he felt that if they only listened to him—and they were listening in a silence that only came out of listening—he would be able to tell them so exactly that everything would be put right. They would say, Well, if that's how it was, there isn't anything to be done about it.

So, my lord, he said, I have to tell you what it was like at the beginning, us being friends and all that, and how it came about that Broido began to talk funny to me about this girl. For days he talked funny to me about her. And I didn't understand why he should talk funny. I couldn't see, my lord, but I knew she was a girl a man would be proud of, besides her having a voice that was like music. Perhaps I shouldn't talk about her like this in a Court of Law, but I have to. Because it was this girl that made us

quarrel, she didn't come between us, we quarrelled because he said one thing about her and I said another.

Well, what *did* he say? says Mr. Stanley, sharply.

I'm coming to that. I'll come to that presently, my lord. We went on quarrelling, quietly, Broido saying funny things, things I didn't like, and me telling him he was mad. I didn't know why he said these things; there didn't seem to me to be a reason. And it wasn't very nice having things said about a person who——

He stopped, aware that he was now up against the whole question of Stephanie after having done his best to keep off it, to skirt round it. A person who—well, what was he going to say? How was he going to describe the true relationship that existed between him and Stephanie? He left the sentence unfinished. It seemed to him all the same that the Court, just like an ordinary person, had filled in for him the unspoken words.

I had tea that evening the same as usual, the girls wasn't in, only Ma, only Mrs. Roos was there giving me my tea, and after tea I went to my room and sat on the bed waiting for Broido to come and take me back to the workshop where we had this work to finish. I was feeling very unhappy at this upset in our friendship, me and Broido, and I said to myself that

I had done nothing. I sat there thinking and waiting, and to amuse myself I played some music but it didn't help much, and presently he came.

My lord, says Mr. Stanley——

No, Mr. Stanley, says the judge, let him go on.

We got to the workshop, hurrying as much as we could from the tram because of the rain. Broido switched on the light; I heard the click of the switch; he put me down on my bench and made me feel with my hands where the chair was and the bundle of cane and the caning tools, and we began to work. At first he didn't say anything. But I couldn't go on, I wanted to clear it all up, this quarrel about a girl, and show him that he was wrong, I only wanted him to say, All right, I'm wrong; I wanted to show him, let him see that we was still friends, him and me, only friends couldn't go on disagreeing about a girl like that, like we was doing.

I was a bit afraid, and my heart was beating, because I didn't usually talk about her as I was now going to do.

I said, Broido, you've no call to talk about her like that, you've no call to go on at me the way you do, no call to go saying funny things that I don't understand.

Hell, he said, I don't care. I ain't got to make you

understand. Some bloody fellows ain't got no brains.

I passed over that. I didn't want to get mad with him. So I said nothing, but went on working at the chair; I heard the wind blowing down the street, and the noise the rain made on the iron roof; I was thinking how I could get him to stop, to stop talking like he was. About her, not about me.

Then he said, I suppose you think you're the cat's whiskers now you got a girl, he said, laughing sarcastic.

You don't know everything, I said.

Ho, he said, ho, don't I? Some chaps is more blind than they need be.

Meaning me? I said.

It don't take a clever chap, he said, to know his own shoes.

I can't help being blind, I said, not knowing what he meant.

Who's talking about your being blind? he said. What I can't stand is yer blasted air of innocence, like a blasted parson you are, like a blasted parson walkin' out with his missus and pretending they never seen each other undressed. You and your blasted girl, eh?

Well, that began to make me mad. Broido, I said, you been a good friend to me, but we can't go on if you talk about St—— about her like that. Chuck it!

I said, feeling angry, or it'll be the worse for you.

He laughed again, on purpose. You can't do anything, he said. Why, I could throw you over my head as quick as think about it.

All right, I said, let's leave it at that. Only you got to stop talking about her. I can't work in the workshop any more if you don't stop.

He saw that I was serious, I suppose, because he said, after a bit of a pause, I picked up then a fresh bit of cane, Hans, he said, you don't understand me. I'm thinking about you. I don't like to see you being taken in. D'you mean to say that you think this girl that was with Bernardus that night in the café—his cousin, eh?—that she's a bloomin' innocent, a blessed little lamb that's never lost no wool?

I said, Yes, that was exactly what I did think. Why shouldn't I?

Because it isn't true.

What isn't true? I said, slowly, and stopping work.

That she's a bloomin' innocent. Innocent your foot. You're easy took in.

Are you trying to make me mad? I said.

I'm trying to teach you not to be a bloody fool. Haven't I been trying to do that for five years?

I didn't expect that, my lord. How could he be a friend, and say a thing like that?

I said to myself, well, I thought Broido was being my friend all these years; and now it seems he wasn't. I felt sick in my stomach.

Broido, I said, it's all over between you and me.

Don't be a kid, he said; ain't you a man yet?

More than you think, I said.

Well, then, make up your mind to it that she's a no-good.

Hans stood up and stretched out his arm. That is what he said, my lord, a no-good.

As he stood he heard in the pause before he spoke a sound of movement as though everybody in court had stirred, swayed, shifted in their seats. He heard a cough or two, a faint whisper, then silence. He knew as well as though someone had told him that they were waiting for him to go on.

But the judge speaks. He says, Well, what did you do then?

I did nothing, my lord. I tried to push the cane through the holes in the chair, but my hand trembled. Broido began whistling. I said to him that I thought I would go home.

There is a pause. Mr. Stanley puts a question. He says, What actually was the position between you and this young lady?

He finds it difficult to answer. He says at last that

she wasn't properly his sweetheart and of course she wasn't his sister, yet in a way she was a bit of both. There wasn't anybody like her. He would put his hand in the fire for her, he says, raising his hand in the air for all in the court to see.

Presently Mr. Pons says, How long had you known her?

About four or five months.

And in all that time you had no reason to suppose that she was other than—a very nice girl?

No.

The judge says, When you said you thought you would go home, did you make a move to go home?

No, my lord. I couldn't move, I couldn't do anything. I felt like a piece of stone. Broido whistled and whistled till I told him to stop. He said, Oh, I thought you liked music; but he stopped. Then suddenly he said, Well, at any rate you know that *she* didn't like it, not your bloody music, he said, not the mouth-organ, eh? No, I said, but she likes music, she knows what it is. Yes, he said, there isn't much she don't know. He said a lot more, the whole world seemed to be turning as black in my head as it was in front of my eyes. Then in a new strange voice, a bitter voice, bitterer than I had ever heard, he said, Poor bloody blind men, eh? We're easy to deceive.

Any woman can put it across *us*. That's true, eh? You can't say it isn't. How do *you* know she ain't deceivin' you?...Stop, stop! I said, but he didn't seem to hear....How am I to know, he said, that she ain't deceivin' *me?* Hans, he says, I may as well put you out of your misery. You can take it from me, he says, that she's——

But no, he can't go on. The word sticks in his throat. He can't say it, here in court, when for all he knows she too may be listening to him, in the crowd. Stephanie! And the judge may yet decide to call her, to say that she must come and stand in the witness-box where now he was and swear before them all to tell them what she knew, to answer questions.

Yet if he does not tell them what Broido said, the infamous things he said, how can they know that he had to stop the foul mouth that said these awful things? About a girl, a girl who had brought heaven into his life?

He must, he must tell them, he felt that they were waiting, he must face this or the prison cell. He shuddered, literally.

The judge said, Let the witness have a glass of water.

He knew then that the judge was watching him. He was glad to have the water.

Pulling himself together he went on. He had no strength, he felt that his voice was falling, falling as he said, My lord, he said to me then, Hans, he said, you can take it from me she's a whore.

I stood up, but I was trembling. How dare you say that, Broido! It's shameful, shameful!

Maybe, he said, but if it's true?

It's not true, I said.

How do you know?

Well, there are things you can't say how you know. But I did know. I'd put my hand in the fire on it. I said, We're through, Broido, you and me. I didn't know a man could say a thing like that.

Poor bloody blind man! he said, tormenting me.

I began to go away.

He said, where are you going?

I'm going home, I said. You need never come for me again.

That seemed to sting him. Very well, damn you, he said. And going on, he said, did you see her every day? No. Did you know where she lived? No. Did you know where she went when for a whole week at a time she didn't come near you? No. Of course you didn't. You didn't want to. You don't want to. You make her a saint, she ain't. Don't I know? he said, shouting it at me; haven't I slept with her? often?

And she deceiving me, deceiving me and you and who knows who else? I hate her, I hate women, I hate them all, they're poison—— But I stopped him, saying, Broido, do you know what you've said?

Yes, he said, I know. I'll say it again.

And going back a few steps to where the chairs were, I said, Do you know that you've said, liar that you are, that you've slept with my girl——

Yes, and she chucked me, just as she'll——

Stop! I said. You've said enough. Never before were you a liar, Broido, but you're a liar now.

He was sitting, but I heard him stand up. We were near each other, but exactly where he was I didn't know.

Oh, a liar, am I? he said, you bloody fool, you and your no-good.

I struck out with my fist and it hit him, somewhere in the face. I felt his fists then hitting out at me, but I never noticed any hurts. We got hold of each other; I heard the chairs falling about; we struggled, trying to get each other down; he was stronger than me, but I was mad, I had the strength of madness, and he couldn't get me down. We fought, like bears, hugging and tearing and biting and in the struggle we passed from the workshop to the stone landing at the top of

the stairs! Stop! I kept shouting at him. Stop! stop! and he kept shouting at me. She's a no-good!

He paused. The Court waited for him. His throat was constricted, he felt his body moving, uncontrolled, from side to side as though he didn't know which way to turn; he could scarcely speak, yet he must go on.

At last, facing the judge once more, he said, We struggled—and he said that, my lord—shouted it, that infamous thing—and it wasn't true, my God, it wasn't true. The tears poured down his cheeks from his sightless eyes as he stood there, facing the judge, holding on to the ledge of the witness-box with both hands so that he should not fall.

Mr. Pons said something, Mr. Stanley said something else; what they said wasn't important. He was thinking as he pressed a handkerchief to his eyes that if Stephanie was in court she would know that, for all Broido had said, he believed in her. All the little doubts that had tormented him, come and go, in the prison cell were now at rest. His very vehemence of denial in public, under oath, before this stern judge who knew everything already, had made him certain with himself. Stephanie was his, his golden girl with the golden voice, pure and priceless. Nothing mattered now.

After a long pause, in which it seemed that the Court was giving him time to recover himself, the judge said, It is important that you should now tell us, if you can, what happened after that.

What happened? He searched his mind. That was where his consciousness had left off.

My lord, he said, I don't know. We were mad, we struggled and fought, two blind men who could see nothing, couldn't see each other, couldn't see where they were. On a narrow landing it was, of stone, and suddenly Broido was not there. I heard the noise of his body bumping on the stairs. If I could tell you any more, my lord, I would. I have told you all I can remember.

And the iron bar? says Mr. Stanley.

He was very distressed. Why should they go on about the iron bar? Well, he couldn't stand any more, he was at the end. The strain was telling on his voice, he felt it like some strange broken sound coming out of his parched mouth. This was far worse than he had thought. What could he say? He seemed to be reaching a point where perhaps he would say things without knowing. He would have to answer Mr. Stanley.

Yes, he said, there was an iron bar loose in the railing of the landing; the railing also went down the stairs. I don't know any more.... My lord, I don't

know any more; if I did I would tell you. We hit each other and struggled, for a long time, and then a blank came over my mind and into the blank came the feeling that Broido was not there, and I heard the thud-thud on the stairs. My lord, I would tell you if I knew.

The sombre voice of the judge said, Put the iron railing into the witness's hand.

Someone walked across the floor of the court, Hans heard the ring of the man's heavy boots. There was no other sound. From the table the man walked to the witness-box; each step rang out distinct in the silent Courthouse; he could feel the tense atmosphere of expectancy; fear seemed to press upon his head like an immense weight, an external thing; no, he couldn't touch it, he wouldn't, this thing that had killed Broido, and he thrust his hands out before him as though to repudiate it, to ward it off.

The cold iron was put into his right hand, his fingers closed over it. In a flash his mind went back to the struggle on the landing, the bodies interlocked, legs fighting legs and arms fighting arms, he felt now the great strength of Broido working against him, the great weight of Broido bearing him down, he was losing, he put forth his own strength till his muscles cracked, his breath was short, his head bursting, and

at a crucial moment swinging his arm he struck the railing, and the same instant his hand, a sentient thing, closed round the iron railing, for support. But it was no support, it was the loose rail, and it came away in his hand; he remembered now the cold feel of the iron in his hot hand. A weapon. He hit and hit, wildly, madly, hitting in the air with the loose rail. Broido let go, his frightful grip relaxed, and in the silence the only sounds were the thuds on the stair and his own racing breaths....

He stood there; with the bar in his hand. What was he to do? The whole truth? He knew it committed him. But it was not the whole truth, the inner truth—it was *necessary* to stop Broido. Without the bar he couldn't have done it; perhaps he instead of Broido would have gone down the stairs, striking his head, getting killed. The Court was waiting. He said nothing. He could hear the flutter of papers, and the shuffling of feet. The feel of the iron in his hand was like a spell, it seemed to him that suddenly his eyes would open and he would see this iron bar, the weapon that fate, and fate alone, had put into his hand.

No, he would say nothing. Opening his hand he let the bar fall with a crash. Well, that was the end.

Someone came and took the bar away. God, he

said, is there blood on my hand? I must wipe it off; and taking his handkerchief he wiped the hand that held the bar. Then, with a little laugh, he put the handkerchief back in his pocket; of course, how silly of him; he was in the court. He wondered what would happen next; feeling for the chair, he sat down on it and waited.

After the fight, said Mr. Pons, what did you do?

When the blackness went out of my mind and I found that Broido wasn't there, I stood at the top of the stairs and called Broido, several times, but there was no answer. I went down the stairs, and feeling with my hands I found him at the bottom. I called him again, and tried to raise him, he was very heavy, and at first I thought he was in a faint, stunned with his head bumping on the stairs. Then all at once I was afraid, because it seemed to me that he was dead. I went upstairs and feeling along the wall for the switch, I switched off the light; I went into the lavatory and washed my hands, they had blood on them trying to lift Broido; and after that I switched off the light on the landing. It was all the same to me whether the light was on or off. I then went down the stairs and listened to hear if he was breathing; I could hear nothing; I was afraid, and dared not touch him again.

I wondered what I should do. Standing by the door I could hear the rain and the wind; there was no one about; the Pompadour was not far, and feeling my way with my hand on the walls of buildings, for I had left my stick in the workshop, I got presently to the Pompadour Café, where I told them that Broido had fallen down the stairs; then the Greek sent for the police....

It was easy now, this telling of the story; he felt he could go on, telling them every little thing, but like a man in a trance, for he had no further interest in it. He was indeed a sort of spectator, but the matter was not one that needed much attention. Voices were in the air, he answered several questions, and through it all he was saying to himself that, well, he had told no lies. Not like Broido. Did Broido tell lies? Did he? Nothing was worse than this terrible question that he was asking himself always, and answering, yet never getting a real answer. And no one he could ask. Nor, if he asked them, could they tell him. No one could tell him, only Broido, who was dead, and Stephanie....

More questions.

Do you still deny, says Mr. Stanley, that you hit this man with the rail?

We were struggling, I have told you. He was very

strong. We didn't know what we were doing. Yes, there was a loose rail. Broido knew there was a loose rail, too. He said to me once, There's a loose rail; it ought to be mended; one day there will be an accident.

Mr. Pons now asks a question. He says, When you went down the stairs the first time, did you find Broido on the stairs, or at the bottom of the stairs?

No, he was not on the stairs. He had fallen all the way down, like a sack.

The likelihood is then that rolling over and over he struck his head on the sharp edges of the stone stairs several times?

Hans didn't know. It was, he thought, possible. He heard a thud-thud like something hard striking the stone stairs, not such a dull sound as a body would make. He thought perhaps Broido had missed his footing and fallen back and been stunned, and so gone on falling, but he couldn't say. He was wrought up, he couldn't say that he knew what he was doing. (Mr. Pons did not want him to say anything about the iron bar?)

Nobody seemed to have any more questions to ask, so the Court adjourned. They took him down to the cell below the stairs—perhaps it wasn't really a cell?

He knew it was bigger, but it had a cold damp smell —and someone brought him his dinner. No, he said, I don't want any. But it was left, close to his hand, and presently he found that he had eaten it. Without knowing, he said, or almost, because in his mind he was going over every point of the trial, repeating what he had said and coming on different answers, better ones, that he might have made to the questions they had asked. He shuddered again as he thought of the judge having the iron bar put into his hand. Almost he felt sick at the idea, and terribly the thought came into his mind that perhaps, with the iron bar in his hand, he had told the Court the things that it had thus suggested. Had he spoken his thoughts aloud, without knowing it? As the judge meant him to? Yet Mr. Stanley hadn't taken it up; no one had said anything. But the notion made him restless; getting up and feeling his way with his hands he moved about this room in the basement of the Courthouse, the sense of being trapped coming up and growing for him, trapped in the meshes of the law. He remembered the ominous sentence from a story Stephanie had read to him, and he ceased to think of the rights and wrongs of it, of Broido and the killing, if killing it was, ceased even to think of Stephanie or of anything but this awful renewed feeling of being held

in a trap, something primal, elemental from which there was no escape. What can I do! he said, but his lips made no sound as he stood shivering again by the damp wall across which his fingers moved, a few feet only either way, yet the wall gave him the impression of being endless in all directions.

The shivering, the trembling went on; where was the bench? He was lost in this chilly room, standing by the wall, scarcely able indeed to stand, utterly unable to move from where he was. He knew now that he would not escape; they would sentence him; he had killed Broido? It didn't matter. Perhaps Broido after all had only told the truth, and the girl was a ——

Without losing consciousness his legs gave and he collapsed on to the floor. Silly, he said, but feeling bad. He sat up, propping his back against the wall. All the strength gone out of me, he said. All the strength, and him that should have been a runner. Only, went blind. Never be anything. And nobody to care.

Hallo, said Mr. Pons, coming in, What's this? Aren't you well?

Yes, said Hans, he was all right.

You don't look it, said Mr. Pons. Pull yourself together. You did all right in the box, you kept your

end up. But you have got to go on keeping your end up.

Hans couldn't understand the easy cheery speech of Mr. Pons but he did all the same manage to get to his feet saying, nervously, What will they do, Mr. Pons?

Mr. Pons didn't say anything for a bit. Then he said, Oh, it isn't over yet, man. Not by any means. I'm not dissatisfied. But you've got to help me. A hang-dog look won't help. They'll put you back now in the dock; you don't have to say anything more. But you mustn't be fidgetty; just sit down, and listen as you did at the beginning. You made a good impression on the jury. We've got to see what we can do with the old man.

The old man? said Hans.

Yes, the judge, said Mr. Pons, helping his client to the wooden bench against the wall.

Hans thanked him, but he couldn't understand how it was possible for Mr. Pons to talk about the judge as the old man, the judge whose voice, sombre, authoritative, even harsh, was for him akin to the very voice of God. Now Mr. Pons called him the old man, in a familiar friendly way; but it was heartening to think of him like that, the old man, a human being, who would understand human actions, not

putting them to the test of implacable inexorable laws. A man, said Hans, that would make allowances, more, would put himself in your place and see that you had to do what you did do.

But he was too tired to think any more. He sat on the hard bench where Mr. Pons had put him, waiting for this long business of being tried to be gone on with. To be got over and done with. One way or the other.

They came and took him up the narrow stone stairs and put him back in the prisoner's dock. He sat down. Curiously it seemed a more friendly place than the box. And he found surprisingly that he wasn't tired any more; he was all attention to the noises of the Court, people talking as he came in, but the talking stopped, he noticed, immediately, only the little noises went on, shuffling, a cough, a sneeze, the scraping of a boot, even the sound, his fine ears detected, of the human mass breathing, making an air disturbance.

He sat quite still, in his old position, arms resting along the edge of the dock and his chin on his wrists, the one wrist overlapping the other, his whole body thus inclined forward; he was like a man asleep, his eyes closed, yet actually aware of all that was going on.

Mr. Stanley, it seemed, was making a speech about him, yet it was strangely impersonal. He was, of course, Hans knew, addressing the jury, making out his case, the case against the accused, that was himself, but as he listened he came under a sort of spell, he was bewitched by the music in Mr. Stanley's voice, so pleasant a voice, going up and down the scale so easily, yes, it was of the essence of music, like Stephanie's. Yet this marvellously modulated voice was attacking him.

Or was he not attacking him? Mr. Stanley said that it was a difficult case, in which there were no eyewitnesses, and both the men were blind. But everything pointed to the fact that the death of the one man was due to the action of the other. In his opinion, the circumstantial evidence was conclusive. He would run through the evidence briefly, but before he did so he wanted to say that he wished to be looked on, in the execution of his duty, rather as one defending the deceased than attacking the accused. It was not a sordid case; it was indeed a very remarkable one. It evolved out of a quarrel, not a quarrel over a girl in the usual sense but a quarrel over a girl's name. And a quarrel at that between two men who had been, for a number of years, the best of friends.

The mellifluous voice flowed on, Hans listening and marvelling at the way Mr. Stanley, telling only the truth, as it seemed, spoke of all the events, the words, as evidence of the innocence of one man and the guilt of the other.

It is not my business either, said Mr. Stanley, to make out this man Broido to have been a better man than he was. He was a strong man, brave enough, it seems, no coward and not a liar. I repeat not a liar, yet a man embittered by his environment, the circumstances of his blindness. Women, it would seem, liked him; he was a protective, elder brother, as well as a friend, to the accused—we have it on the accused's own showing. What interest had he in defaming the good name of this young woman? The sole reason given by the accused, in the witness-box, for this attack on his friend, is the mere calling of her, in his own phrase, a no-good. Then he says that Broido pretended that he had slept with her. What then? The accused claims that this girl was pure, unspotted: he had therefore no cause to be jealous of Broido, because he did not believe in these assertions. On his side jealousy does not seem to come into it. Indeed the more we look at it, the more tenuous seem his motives for raising his hand against his friend.

But, gentlemen of the jury, you may ask why Broido said these things—if he did say them. I submit that actually the boot was on the other foot; we have seen that Broido knew the girl before she met the accused; may it not have been that the younger man, for all his blindness, stole the girl's affections from his friend, and that in a pique of jealousy Broido, an embittered man, cast these aspersions against her virtue? Other men have done the same. This is not to defend the practice. It does, however, throw a suggestive light on that unwitnessed dreadful talk, that quarrel, that ghastly fight between the two men. There is no evidence whatever that Broido had ever tampered with the girl. It was perhaps a sulky jealousy on the one side; and an unreasoning rage on the other side. It ended in the death of Broido. And the death of Broido—Mr. Stanley paused for a moment—the death of Broido was due to repeated blows from an iron bar. That iron bar lies before you.

Hans was stunned as though by the very bar now brought forcibly, for the third time, to the rapt attention of the Court. He groped about among the phrases of Mr. Stanley's address, hypnotised by the strange musical quality of his voice rising at the end to an unlooked-for fullness, a strength as of organ

tones, but not deep; yet every implication was adverse. Here were all the facts, and the conclusions drawn. No one could get round them. Hans was appalled. It seemed to him that the jury must be looking at him as one looks at a monster; they would have no mercy; he was done for. Yet wriggling in his brain was a phrase that with infinite contortions came slowly to the top, the phrase that proved Broido to have been wrong. Mr. Stanley had admitted it. No evidence, he had said, to show that Broido had ever tampered with the girl. Well, said Hans, wasn't that just what he had always said? A thousand things flashed through his mind, sounds, scents, feelings, instantaneous thoughts, a synthesis of his happiness both with Stephanie and with Broido, the whole happiness of his young life, and he felt as a man might feel, relieved of some vast burden under the weight of which he was slowly sinking to the ground. No evidence whatever. He snapped his fingers at the jury. He scarcely knew when Mr. Pons began to speak.

...Even if we are agreed on that point, said Mr. Pons, it is clear that, failing an eye-witness, the alternative hypothesis cannot be ruled out. The prosecution claims that the accused used a weapon, but the prosecution cannot prove it. Now the whole case

hangs on this use of a weapon. The medical evidence testifies to several blows on the head. One such blow could be caused by the head of a falling man striking the rail in the railing at the top of the stairs; other blows might equally arise from the head, stunned, striking in succession several stone stairs as the body rolled to the bottom. This is a tenable hypothesis: it cannot be ruled out. The medical evidence says that all the blows were in one direction; it cannot be held impossible for even these to have been inflicted by the stairs. It is slender ground on which to find a man guilty of a crime.

Let us go back for a moment, says Mr. Pons, his cold, clear voice carrying throughout the court, it seems to Hans, as no other voice had done; so cold, so clear, so unruffled, and behind the words a sense of illimitable patience as though nothing would be too small, too unimportant for Mr. Pons to bring forward in his defence. Already he feels a new confidence drawn from this confidence, balanced and calculated, in the voice of Mr. Pons, latent, yet showing through.

Let us go back, said Mr. Pons, to that tragic evening. It is plain to us all, from what the accused has said, that he was, and is, deeply attached to this young woman. It is no less plain, my lord and gentlemen of

the jury, that he is also a man of honest but strong emotions. He is, we understand, something of a musician. He is young, healthy, very much in love, and of a nature to be strongly aroused by insults either to his young woman or, one may add, to his friend. Were he so fortunate as to have the use of his eyes, we should be justified in saying that for a moment, under the lash of this man Broido's tongue, he saw red.

Then followed the fight, which he has described for us, and in which his opponent was the stronger man; we have no reason to doubt him; the words were not put into his mouth; indeed in all honesty he admits that he it was who probably struck the first blow—if blow it was from blind fists waving in the air.

My point, however, is not with the fight. The prosecution has claimed that the accused used a weapon; their whole case hangs on the alleged use of this iron bar. No one was there, we do not know. My point is that this case is primarily psychological; given the initial circumstances the quarrel and the fight were inevitable; neither this man nor that was to blame: the clash was based on their common humanity.

Now what were the circumstances?

Mr. Pons, in his turn, goes over the circumstances. Hans listens, and marvels at the clever way Mr. Pons makes all the points tell in his favour, the open honest manner in which he had told his story in the witness-box, his replies to questions, his perspicacity in noticing the loose rail in the railing, his evident distress at the loss of his friend, his admission of what he owed to Broido, his desire that Broido should go on being his friend if only Broido would stop insulting this young woman.

The question arises, says Mr. Pons, his voice changing at this point to a higher key, the question arises, what reason had the deceased for making these insinuations? Gentlemen, he had no reason. He was joking, a clumsy ghastly joke indeed it turned out to be, but joking nevertheless. Remember that this man had not always been blind, he was extraordinarily strong, by no means stupid, a decent enough fellow, but with a kink. A kink due to his environment. He was kind always to his friend, to his little pal Hans, but otherwise often harsh, bitter in his outlook on life. Life hasn't much to give him. And now his pal Hans Segal, who boy and man had depended on him, had indeed meant everything to him, this youngster goes forward, as the young must, begins to carve out a life of his own, begins indeed by

falling in love. Broido laughs. Falling in love, indeed? he seems to say. Damn young fool. But he is sore with the sense of loss. And in his soreness he begins to tease. Well, you know what teasing leads to. He is only joking, but, like many other men, he takes the joke too far.

And Hans Segal, what does he do? He is a simple fellow—we can see that for ourselves, as simple and honest a fellow as we have seen—and he stands it as long as he can. He stands it for days, this clumsy, cruel joking, this teasing, which he takes in all seriousness; he is bewildered, he does not know what to think, but he sticks it. Then he makes up his mind to have it out. Broido is destroying his faith in woman, in friendship, in everything. His mind is in a turmoil. Yet steadily he argues it out with Broido, but Broido at one fatal moment descends from ugly but vague generalities to the particular; he says at last—for him, in some unfathomable way, it is the cream of the jest, this brutal lie—that he has slept with her....

Well, we know the rest. But gentlemen, let me ask you, who is it that goes down the stairs, alone, to try to help his friend? Who is it that tries to lift him but finds that his friend is dead? Who is it that goes to the nearest place known to him, for assistance? Who

is it that has given the Court practically all the information that it has?

No other, gentlemen, than the man before you, the blind man in the dock.

CHAPTER X

He was back in a cell. The judge had spoken. It was night, he did not know how long he had sat thus, inert, lifeless, his mind a blank, his body dead. What had he to move for? He would sit there, lifeless, till the end of time. The judge had spoken. Two years, he had said, two years of silence added to the blackness, two years of nothingness. Back in a cell. It was incredible, so sure he had been that he would walk out, that at the end, the end of the trial, someone would be there to take him home to De Lorentz Street. Ma or Mina, who knows? or even Stephanie. Stephanie would know, she would know everything, things he had never been able to say to her, the trial would have told her. Well, it had told them all. He didn't care. It was a good thing they should all know, and they knew her, keeping her name out made no difference. So she had walked away from the trial, knowing; him they had locked up in prison. A prisoner, not any longer the accused. A condemned man. A criminal.

He stirred, slightly. The thing flooded his mind. A criminal. This was what Broido had done. His whole being, coming up on the new flood of feeling, was filled with resentment; everything could be traced to Broido, to Broido, the bloody bastard, the liar, not his friend. The core of him seemed suddenly to become hot with resentment, white-hot with rage, while at the same time his mind, the thing he worked with, the thing that communicated his resentment to himself, was apathetic, dull, and his body, after a faint stirring, lifeless.

He didn't want to live, he didn't want anything. A warder had brought food, but he wanted no food. That was hours ago. He wanted only to be let alone, to be let die, like a dog not dead yet but kicked into a ditch. And the car goes on. This was not justice, he said, and he passionately desired justice, the justice of being believed, of being understood; those men were a pack of fools, calling themselves the jury, calling themselves men; but the judge had done it, the judge, pointing a finger at him, for after all the judge, it seemed, was God, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob, the old hard God of the farms, of the country, of the prayers and Old Testament readings on the farms, an eye for an eye, well, where were his? His and Broido's? not the God

of mercy, the God of love that people spoke of in the town. No, there was no mercy, there was no love. Men were as hard as God himself. Men, but not women, not Ma nor Mina, nor Sophie, nor Stephanie, the sound of their voices came to him, in the cell, he said, and the sound of Stephanie's was like a stab. He couldn't think of her, he wouldn't, he daren't, or he felt he should go mad, something would happen, not to his head, but to his chest in which, for all his stillness, his body propped against the wall of the cell, there was not a beating but a flooding of his heart, as though his heart could no longer be contained within his ribs. For it might burst.

He had in his ears the low-breathed sounds of her voice saying, Hans, Hans! but he must not think about her, he must think of the trial, of Broido, of anything. What was there he could put himself to think about, what did prisoners think about, that was it, all the time they were in prison? Those that could see. What again did they do? What, in God's name, was he going to do, the blind man, all these months, these years? Well, he would go mad. He felt, in a curious calmness, how easy it would be. It had no terrors for him. He remembered mad people from when he was a boy on the farm, they hurt nobody, not even themselves, one of them was always laugh-

ing, perhaps mad people were happy. And in the midst of this there came again the thought of Stephanie, like a flash of light rather than a thought; and he called her name, in a sort of agony, stretching out his arms, calling her, wanting to touch her, aching for a word. Couldn't she come? Wouldn't they let her? Didn't she want to? Did she know this would happen, this being shut up in a cell, in prison for two years? For her?

His voice came back to him from the bare walls, a strangled sound, and only then did he know that he was talking. Am I talking aloud? he said, for he knew that that was the way people began going mad, and suddenly he knew that he didn't want to go mad. Surely the prison people wouldn't let him go mad, they would help him, something would be done to help a blind man? Surely something would be done, for never before had he so felt the awfulness of being blind. Yes, a blind man, he said, pitying himself.

But he didn't know. All he knew was that the judge had sent him to prison, to this horror of being alone, in spite of everything that Mr. Pons had said, and even in a way Mr. Stanley. The judge had sent him to prison, but it was those jurymen, he said, that done it, those men whose faces he had never seen, and more, whose voices he had never heard, only one

voice that said at the last when after a long time the jury returned, it was already night, he knew, when the trial ended, the one voice said that he was guilty, it didn't say of murder, and it said, definitely but with no special feeling, my lord, it said, the jury very strongly recommend the prisoner to mercy.

The judge gave him two years. What had the God of mercy to say to that? Did they know what loneliness was like to a blind man? Couldn't they see that you could send an ordinary man to prison, but not one that was blind? And thinking of this he moved, self-pity destroyed his apathy, he got up from the pallet-bed, with its coarse blankets, where he had been sitting, hunched up like a sick fowl on a perch, for many hours. It must indeed be far into the night. He moved round the narrow cell, feeling his way with fingers to the wall. Four walls and in one of them a narrow door, he did not know where the window was, because it was night. Here then he was to spend two years of his life. Two years and then to come out, and what then? What after that? No, no, he wouldn't think of that, he mustn't think of anything that would lead to Stephanie, to all she had meant to him, and did still mean, but also to uncertainty, suspicion, to jealousy, to a hundred horrors.

Was it the same cell? So like; yet actually it was

not; he made out small differences in the surfaces of the walls, the angles of the walls, minute differences discernible only to his touch; the door was not in the same precise position in its wall; the hard pallet-bed was, on the other hand, no different. There was no table of any kind, no chair. In the door, at the height of his face, an opening with three or four slender iron bars; the warders, passing, could thus look into his cell, day or night they could look in and see him. Coming to the door and feeling this opening, this grating in the door, he stood there, his face pressed against the bars, breathing the air now not of the cell but of the passage beyond. A warder passed, in soft slippers, Hans heard him coming down the passage. Been to sleep? said the man. No, said Hans. Take my tip and go back to bed, said the man, there was a kindness in his rough voice, go to bed and go to sleep. No good gettin' like this, you know. Obediently Hans went and lay down, he pulled over him the coarse blanket; the warder shuffled on—it made him think of Sophie, Sophie shuffling away out of his room, the most unreal thing it seemed that had ever happened to him, Sophie coming to him and he at the last not wanting her, not wanting her in that way, when Stephanie had come.

Stephanie. Well, the judge knew her name. What

did he know about her? Perhaps the whole case would have been different if the judge had said, after all, that she must be called. Yes! Stephanie would have got him off; Mr. Pons ought to have seen that. But if she had been called the Court, everybody would have known that this was the girl Broido had said was—he put his hands to his head, where the blood was now throbbing, he could feel it in the veins under his fingers pressed to his head beside his temples. No one knew her name except Mr. Pons and Mr. Stanley and the judge, and of course Ma Roos and Mina and Magdalena and the Greek and the district surgeon and Richards and the police and others, perhaps a crowd; well, then, what did *they* think? So many people knew, but what did the judge know? It seemed to Hans, that there was nothing he didn't know. He had pushed aside the elaborate erections of Mr. Pons, Mr. Stanley, he had gone to the heart of the matter—or was it the heart? What was the heart of it, if not the few central facts that the judge had so clearly seen and so plainly set out for the consideration of the jury?

An unusual case, the judge had said, in which there were many unusual features. He referred first of all to the blindness of the deceased and the accused, and then to the fact that these two men were

and had been almost to the day of the catastrophe the closest personal friends. A David and Jonathan friendship, he said, despite certain differences of temperament; there was of course the blindness common to them both. Counsel for the defence had put the accused into the witness-box; it was true to say that without the testimony of the accused they would have little to go on beyond the circumstantial evidence of the police witnesses and the district surgeon; on the other hand, said the judge, you will have to remember in considering your verdict that this man, in the box, had an opportunity to tell his own story in his own way, thus defending himself in a manner that was very difficult, if not impossible, to check.

You will have to decide for yourselves, said the judge, and the low precise almost harsh notes of the judge's voice reverberated now in Hans's head as they had done only that afternoon in the court itself, you will have to decide how much of the accused's statement is actually true, how much is actually false, and how much is or may be false though spoken by the accused in all good faith.

You will have to decide whether it was humanly possible that it should have been an accident. If you rule this out you will then have to decide to what

extent the accused was responsible, if he was responsible, for the death of Broido.

The facts are these: That the man Broido was found dead at the foot of the stairs leading to the workshop run by the Society For The Blind, with grievous wounds on his head. At the top of the stairs an iron bar was found on which there were blood stains. No one was with the deceased that evening but the accused; the accused himself says so. Further he says that they had a quarrel, and a fight. These are the facts, or rather the facts are the death of Broido and the blood-stained iron bar.

For an interpretation of these facts we have to go to the district surgeon, a responsible man of large experience. We learn from him that the man died that evening, but not, in his opinion, from falling down the stairs but from several blows on the head fairly aimed by a heavy blunt weapon. The district surgeon did not see the bar, but other medical evidence analyses the blood-stains, and police evidence proves the finding of the weapon.

It is difficult to understand how a number of blows could thus be delivered on an adversary's head by a blind man, but it is also difficult to believe in the possibility of a similar number of more or less parallel blows being caused, as counsel for the defence

has suggested, by the head striking several of the stone stairs but always at the same axis to the stairs. It is an ingenious suggestion, and you will give it due weight as against the medical hypothesis of blows on the head delivered with an iron bar by a blind man.

Coming to the testimony of the accused in the witness-box you will bear in mind that although you are thus furnished with a motive for this deed, if deed it was, the statements made by him are not necessarily facts, they are not evidence.

But in coming to a conclusion as to the guilt, if any, and as of the degree of guilt, you will have to give these statements the most careful consideration. You must not be swayed by the fact that the accused is a blind man; you must on the other hand review with the utmost care his plea of provocation, both as to its probability—it is unsupported by any other testimony—and as to its extent.

You may dismiss from your minds everything that has been said about the young woman. She has been kept out of the case, quite rightly. If I had thought she could have added anything either in favour of the accused or in favour of the deceased I would have had her called to give her evidence. I am, however, satisfied that the accused is receiving no damage to

his case by this omission. You may now retire to consider your verdict.

A scuffling of feet, and the jury went out. A man came to him and said that the judge had also retired. It seemed a strange proceeding to Hans; it seemed to him they should all wait there while the jury talked it over and made up their minds—it couldn't take them long.

But it did. The men took him downstairs and later on they brought him up once more to the dock. No, it was a false alarm. The jurymen thought they had made up their minds, only to find they hadn't. They sent a message to the judge; the judge sent a message back; no one told Hans what it was about, but the men took him down to the chilly room, below the stairs, for another half hour.

That false alarm! It was cruel. Did they think he had no feelings, was only a clod? It was like being sentenced twice, twice for the same thing. When at last they had taken him up, he had scarcely been able to stand, yet he had to stand to hear the verdict of the jury, two men held his arms so that he shouldn't fall, he wondered how they knew, and to hear the sentence, the dreadful sentence pronounced by the judge. That harsh now grating voice, authoritative, impersonal, implacable, saying that he must go to

prison for two years, saying also other things, agreeing with the jury. Why, yes, said Hans, lying on the pallet under the coarse blanket and rolling his head from side to side, dumbly, like a creature in pain, why, yes, because the jury agreed with him! The jury agreed with God. Well, he had no use for God, if that was the way God paid you for what you didn't ever mean to do. If God didn't know that he never meant to kill Broido, then God wasn't God, he knew no more than the next man, he knew no more than the judge.

Not only his head but his whole body was twisting and turning, he was losing control, a new sort of terror was striking down at him, he let off shriek after shriek, he felt the blood-rush at his head, a loud humming was in his ears, yet, actually, he made no sound, and he was aware of this. His shrieks prompted by fear, seemed to pass from his throat into his head, not to the outward air; it was like being strangled, when you shriek and there is no sound; he knew this, yet he could not stop, he could not help himself. But knowing it, he knew at the same time that he had not quite lost control; a little move, and he knew he would go mad, shriek the house down, but he would try not to; across the terror something was moving, his fingers were moving

in someone's hair, a voice without words was whispering, only the faintest sounds, at his ears; someone was there yet she was not there; she couldn't be and yet she was. She was there, and she had come in time. He lay perfectly still, his twitching body lay calmly now on the prison bed, his fingers holding delicately the edge, slightly frayed, of the prison blanket. Stephanie! he said, but she made no answer. He had expected none. Only her ghost had come, only the ghost of her voice was in his ears, and the ghost of her soft hair had been between his fingers. Call it a dream? He didn't mind. Something had saved him. If he didn't know what it was, he knew it was no dream.

So what now? he said, recovering himself, a shiver running through him, what now? What was he to do? They had said Broido was no coward; what then, was he, Hans? was he going to be a coward? No! no, never! He would show them. Two years? That wasn't a life time.

He sat up, his limbs weak like a man's limbs are after illness, his arms trembling with weakness as he rested on them for a moment the weight of his leaning body, but his mind, he thought, had never been clearer. Suddenly clear and sharp and buoyant. A strange thing. And how hungry he was! He remem-

bered that the warder had brought his supper, cold porridge or whatever it was, and later he had come and taken it away. You eat what you eat; what you don't eat goes away. He hadn't touched his supper, and the warder, taking it away, had said, well, I can't make yer. If yer a fool, yer a fool. And Hans, rocking himself on the bed, even then in a sort of paroxysm of despair, had said, Oh, God, I can't stand it. I can't stand it! And the warder had said, What, two years? That ain't much. Pull yourself together, mate. A rough fellow, the warder, rougher in one way than the warder in the other part of the prison, but more human, a rough coarse warm kindliness he had. Hans could only go on moaning. Come off it, said the warder; yer don't know when yer well off. Two years? Some chaps might 'a got ten. Anyway you don't need to fret; you won't be 'ere long.

That was what the warder had said, and Hans had paid no attention. The words now came back to him. What did the warder mean? Perhaps, said Hans to himself, slowly as though afraid to admit it to his thoughts, perhaps the man meant that as he was blind the law might after all let him off. Let him out after a few weeks, when people would have forgotten. When perhaps there would be another murder, a real murder, in the papers. Oh, it was plain now that the

judge had to sentence him; he could see that; people wouldn't have been satisfied. He hadn't meant to kill Broido, not actually to kill him, but only to stop him, but to kill him if that was the only way to stop him. It was marvellous that he had had the strength to do it, it was extraordinary that in a fight like that he should have held his own, with Broido as strong as a giant, a strong man, and himself only ordinary, and at the end to have had the strength, the cleverness, to get free, to free his arm and get the loose rail in his hand. Only a chance? Yes, but he had taken it, he had been clever. Broido would have taken it. So, in the end, he had been stronger, he had been cleverer than Broido. Than Broido with all his lies. For they were lies, oh, yes, they were.

Lies, he said, bloody lies about Stephanie! And always he had thought that he knew Broido, knew him for hard, harsh, kind to him, not a coward, not a liar. And he had known Stephanie only for as many months as he had known Broido years. Broido every day, Stephanie sometimes only once a week, two or three times a week. Where was she at the other times? What did she do? Where did she live? Oh, she lived in Bloem Street, but where, with whom? How little he knew about Stephanie, though in other ways how much! Prettier than ever! Why had the man said

that? Go away, damn you! Stephanie had said, like he might have said to Broido or someone he knew, not to a stranger. She had explained it. Whatever she had said would have done as well. He couldn't bear to think of anything different. She knew. She knew she could say anything to him, anything. Only had to shove her fingers through his hair and talk to him with her voice like music, and she could do anything; he was like a bit of stick, floating on water, or sand falling through the fingers; he knew that. But what was she?

He was curiously calm. His body had no longer any feeling; it just rested, an inanimate thing, full length on the pallet, where again he was lying, he had fallen back, strangely his feet seemed to be many miles away, his legs immensely long, and if he moved his head, even slightly, it was like moving not an ordinary head but something huge, like a mountain boulder. Yet a clear brain inside it, not sleeping at all, but calmly thinking, considering things deeply, earnestly, but in a calm manner as the judge might have considered them. Considering this whole business of Broido and Stephanie, of which this was not the end—oh, yes, of the trial—but only the beginning. It was necessary to think it out now, reasoning it out, finding one's bearings, for he couldn't go on, couldn't

begin another day without coming to some conclusion. About his girl. It was wonderful to be able to think so calmly. Surely there were things he would be able to call to mind, out of all those tangled yet lovely weeks that would put the thing beyond doubt? Something that would show, definitely, that she wasn't that sort of girl, not what Broido had said? Well, what did he need to show him that? What sign was there that would do? He had his belief. A slender thing. What could he test it by, this belief of his that Stephanie was what he claimed her to be, so claiming her in his own mind? Did you have to have experience for belief? Did you have to have proofs? Stephanie was there in his mind, he could feel her there, like a bird sitting in a nest; what did all the rest matter if he had her there? He was looking forward, he said, the blind man looking already forward, so completely now, suddenly, was the past the past. Over and done with, Broido the friend and at the same time not a friend, a liar yet perhaps not a liar, contraries yet not impossible; just as he had killed Broido yet hadn't killed him. How strange that a thing should at last be done, be finished with, a whole string of events, a lump of his life; and something new begun. There would be the same warm sunny days, the same wet days, the same

cigarettes and coffees and music and people's voices, yet not the same. All new. All utterly new. Somehow even Ma would be new, and all De Lorentz Street. And Stephanie? What sort of newness would there be in Stephanie, what could there be? The same golden voice, the same soft hair, but new, because, with Broido dead the past was gone, there hadn't been a past. He had his belief. It came to his mind that nobody had anything else but their belief, no, not even if they had eyes and could see. No one could know. You had to have belief, or you had nothing.

It was because he had learnt to believe that he had fought Broido; and the strength of his belief was such that he had killed Broido, the giant. He got up, stretching out his arms, how strong he was, all his weakness gone, he saw that even time was nothing, he was strong enough to face time. He would serve his years, if it was to be so, and go out again into the world. Moving now about the cell, what difference was there, he said, between the cell and the whole world, when all the time the world, somehow, was in oneself. He was alive. The difference was with Broido. He touched the walls, paced the floor with more assurance. Belief is the strongest thing. He knew now that proof didn't matter, there could never be proof. Broido had said as much, how

one could never know; Broido had always believed the worst of a woman; he said they were made to deceive; that was why he hated them. Well, what did Broido give them? Only hatred when he got all he wanted, and the cruelty of telling them, of throwing them over. Wouldn't it be their revenge, if they could, to deceive? Broido, teaching him something about the world, had taught him not to put too much faith in it, Broido didn't put any, he even put no faith in Stephanie, he did his best to kill faith. Yet he had his faith, in spite of Broido.

Walking now about the narrow cell, a few counted paces back and forth, but with sensitive fingers touching at bare walls, conscious of his environment, conscious of his body and the firmer pulsations of his blood, it seemed to him that he was already at the beginning of a new life, with the door shut-to upon the old; he was aware of a strange clarity of mind, as though suddenly he had grown up.

It didn't matter what anybody said, nor even what Stephanie had done, before he knew her, had not he and Mina been friends, well, lovers? Why not then Stephanie? He knew in his heart that it didn't matter because of his belief that whatever she did she wouldn't deceive him, she wouldn't deceive anyone, all the time she was with him she was honest, honest

to him, his girl with the golden voice, who came and took the blind man out for walks, and she all liveliness to his stiffness, his careful step, let him hold her hand and run his fingers through her hair, never more than that, well, he would put his hand in the fire for her, for her honesty, and Broido was wrong, wrong, wrong....

The words rose to his lips, and lifting his head he was aware of a difference in the cell, he knew now where the window was, to the sightless eyes came the sensation of light, and he knew that the morning had come.

(1)